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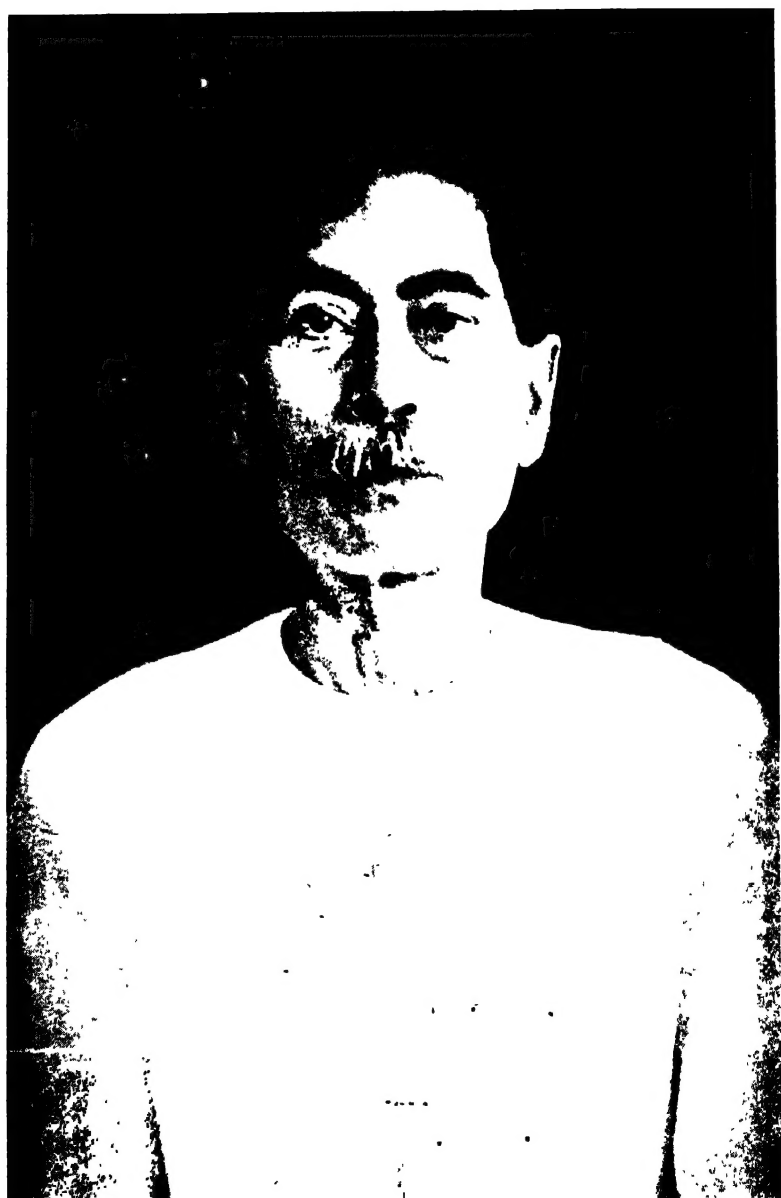
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***MUNSHI PREMCHAND***



Premchand

# MUNSHI PREMCHAND

## A Literary Biography

MADAN GOPAL



ASIA PUBLISHING HOUSE  
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**To**  
**Premakanta, Neeraja and Sachin**  
**and**  
**Shivrani Devi, Sripatrai and Amritrai**



## Preface

THIS BIOGRAPHY OF the late Munshi Premchand aims at projecting his personality and development as a writer, who voiced the aspirations of the people of India in the early part of the century and during the Gandhian era, and also as a man and as a thinker. In a sense it represents the fulfilment of a commitment made in my earlier book (*Premchand*, Lahore, 1944), wherein I had promised to attempt a full-dress biography of the great author.

In doing this literary portrait, my familiarity with Hindi as well as Urdu has given me an advantage over many writers who, because of their knowledge of one or the other, had to depend solely on literature available in one of the languages. I have in general consulted almost everything of consequence written on Premchand, including Shrimati Shivrani Devi's *Premchand Ghar Men*, the reminiscences of a large number of Premchand's friends and contemporaries as recorded in the Premchand memorial numbers of *Hans* and *Zamana*, and the writings of other litterateurs published from time to time.

The single source of greatest help, however, has been the rich material contained in the unpublished letters of Premchand, which I have collected at great expense in money and time from many places in India. The story of their collection is a long one, and goes back to the time when I was writing my first book. Having already collected some letters in that connection, I realised that attempts must immediately be made to collect other letters of Premchand. I wrote to Sripatrai, the elder son of Premchand, if this work had been undertaken already. As early as March 5, 1943, he wrote to me that Premchand's letters "could not be collected; the entire project postulates the whole-time energy of a man and, unless somebody takes it up as a mission, I do not think we may make much headway." Aware of the all-round apathy towards a work of this nature, I took it

up as a mission, and set about the difficult task of collecting letters. This work, spread over the last twenty years, continues to this day.

An important part of this work was to find out the names—and addresses—of persons who might have known Premchand and, among them, those who might have had a chance of being in correspondence with him. This required a good deal of research and study and meant approach to various persons in different parts of the country, as also correspondence with those whose addresses were so ascertained. At times this proved a wild-goose chase; by and large, however, the results were good.

The next step was to approach those people who possessed some of the letters, either through correspondence or personally, for the purpose of securing the originals or their copies. While some, such as Daya Narain Nigam, Mahtabrai, M. G. Joshi, K. R. Sabarwal and Vishnu Prabhakar, generously and voluntarily parted with the original ones, others, like Jainendra Kumar, loaned me the letters to enable me to make copies or photostats; some others allowed me to make copies in their own presence, and yet other friends, such as Bhisham Sahni, made copies of the letters collected by them available to me. The effort involved in making out copies or preserving the text of these letters has proved extremely rewarding in the sense that the originals of many of these letters have since either been lost or become untraceable, or, as a result of the partition of the country, lie across the border and are inaccessible.

I might mention here that the procurement of the letters, either in original or copies thereof, was not the most important part of the job. Many of these letters, specially those of the earlier phase, bore no mention of the place or the date of writing. An attempt had, therefore, to be made to determine the correct date, month and year, on the basis of the postal marks on the postcards or the clues contained within the body of the letters, or with the help of the international calendar, or by checking and cross-checking facts with the aid of old files of journals which published the articles or short stories, etc. referred to in the letters. Tracing of old files of journals, now extinct, has in itself been a very arduous job and, like the collection of the letters, entailed visits to various people and places in different parts of the country. In some cases this checking and cross-checking became



all the more necessary because Premchand himself had given more than two or three dates for one single event (e.g. the publication of his early works); and the confusion was made worse confounded by the data given by his close friends and contemporaries and by Mrs. Premchand.

Recognising the value of these letters in throwing light on the life and literary career of Premchand, Amritrai, his younger son, wrote to me in 1952 that my work "meant the fulfilment of what I had treasured as a mere wish." He asked me to publish my compilation but I wanted to make the collection richer and more comprehensive, so that it could depict the true-to-life image of the greatest Hindi writer of the age—Premchand. Early in 1959 Amritrai came to me personally and told me that he had been able to collect a large number of letters on his own, and that, with the letters in my collection, the desired true-to-life image of Premchand could be projected. As he wanted to publish the book from his own publishing house, I gave my consent to the publication of a book of the letters of Premchand under our joint authorship, either in one volume or in two. Amritrai proposed to publish the letters in two volumes. I agreed, and made available a typescript of some three hundred pages. The volumes, I understand, would be out shortly.

My collection of letters, incidentally, is so rich in providing details of his life and his works that, I feel, without these letters no biography could be really authentic.

It may also be mentioned that whereas the bulk of the work and the first draft of the book were completed before I left the staff of the *Statesman*, New Delhi, in 1952, it has taken me nearly a decade to check and cross-check the chronology and correctness of the material gathered. It necessitated frequent visits to libraries or to private collections.

All these labours became necessary because my attempt has all along been that the work should be as authentic as possible and that it should convey to the reader an integrated and faithful picture of Premchand. With this end in view, I have quite freely used quotations from his letters and autobiographical short stories, articles, etc. (The rendering from Urdu and Hindi into English in most cases is free.)

In response to a suggestion made by some friends and kind critics of my earlier book, notably Shri K. M. Munshi, who

thought that without the summaries or synopses of the short stories and novels, a reader in English would not be able to get an idea of the development of Premchand as a writer, I have given brief summaries of his novels, short stories and gist of important viewpoints expressed in his essays and articles, etc.

Before concluding, I would like to record my thanks to my wife for her valuable assistance in arranging the pile of material collected by me over the years and in handling the secretarial part of the work.

*New Delhi*

MADAN GOPAL

## Acknowledgements

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Amritrai for the information contained in his essay *Vans Bel*, published in November 1960 in *Kadambini*, Allahabad;

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The Principal, Normal College, Gorakhpur, for showing me the service book of Premchand and the accounts collected by the College from Premchand's pupils;

The staff of the Nagari Pracharini Sabha, Banaras; the Punjab Public Library, Lahore (as in early forties); Idara-i-Adbiyat-i-Urdu and the Osmania University Library of Hyderabad; the Marwari Library, Mahavir Jain Library and Delhi University Library, Delhi; the Jamia Millia Library, Karolbagh, Delhi (destroyed in the 1947 disturbances); for their ungrudging assistance in consulting files of old journals.



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## The Ancestors

FOUR MILES FROM Banaras, on the road to Azamgarh, lies the little hamlet of Lamhi, *Mauza* Mundhwa, with a population of two hundred. It was here that on July 31, 1880, was born Dhanpatrai who, as the author of famous novels and short stories appearing under the pen-name of "Premchand," attained fame throughout India and abroad. His father's name was Ajaiblal, and his mother's Anandi Devi.

Ajaiblal belonged to the *Kayastha* community which accounted for nearly one-third of the population of the village, and preferred to send its sons up for such professions as those of the village *patwari*, the village postmaster, the village school teacher, agent of the lawyer, *zamindar*, etc.

Ajaiblal's father, Gursahailal, was a *patwari* of Lamhi village. He extorted money from the cultivators and had the reputation of being a drunkard who used to beat his wife mercilessly.

Anandi Devi's father who belonged to Karauni village, close to the present Banaras University campus, was the agent of a *zamindar*. Handsome, strong and crafty, he had a literary bent of mind and was reported to have written a few books which never saw the light of day.

Ajaiblal, the third of the four sons of Gursahailal, became, like his elder brother and through him, a village postmaster on a salary of ten rupees a month. He helped his younger brother to become a postmaster, and also got two of his relations fixed up as postmen. He was an honest person—straightforward, balanced and soft-spoken. Even though he had read the *Gita* and the *shastras*, he did not believe in the traditional religion. Most of the religious ceremonies, according to him, were sham; true religion meant good deeds.

Ajaiblal carried himself well and was respected by all in the village. He would at times be made a *panch* to give his decisions, which he did boldly without fear or favour.

He was known for his willingness to do good to everybody and anybody, and he bore the brunt of maintaining the families of three of his brothers, looked after the widow of his younger brother who had embezzled government money and disappeared, arranged for the marriage of the brother's youngest daughter, and sent every month five rupees to his nephew's widow and two rupees to the widow of an uncle. This he was able to do out of his very meagre salary because, as was customary in those days, he received foodgrains, milk, vegetables, *gur*, etc. as presents from the villagers in return for services like reading out or writing letters for them and handling money orders from those who had left for far-off places.

It is said that Ajaiblal had taken more after his mother who was sober, balanced and peace-loving. Unlike his father, he was not known for any maltreatment of his wife Anandi Devi.

Anandi Devi was a gentle woman. Of medium height, well-formed body, she was the prettiest in the family. People said she had inherited good looks from her father. Delicate, fair, with beautiful eyes, a well-shaped nose, long hair and a sweet voice, she was well-mannered and was never seen quarrelling with others or gossiping. Like her husband, she was kind-hearted and would like to help anybody she could. She knew a little *Kaithi* and taught it to other women in the house.

Anandi Devi bore Ajaiblal four children. The first two were daughters, delivered in her father's house in Karauni. Both died in infancy. The women of Lamhi said that Karauni village was haunted, and the children born to Anandi Devi in her father's village could not live. When, therefore, the time for the third delivery came, Anandi Devi stayed on in Lamhi. And the third child, a daughter named Suggi, survived her parents. Six or seven years after Suggi's birth, came a son who was named Dhanpatrai by his father, and Navabrai by his uncle. The country, however, knew him by a different name—Premchand—and it is by that name that we shall speak of him in this book.



PREMCHAND WHO, LIKE his father, was fair-complexioned and physically a weakling, appears to have been a very intelligent child and mischievous, as most little children are. Once, in his infancy, we are told, he along with some other playmates, imitated a barber. The edge of the bamboo chip used in place of the razor was sharp, and the earlobe of one of Premchand's playmates started bleeding. The child cried, and his mother complained to Premchand's. The latter shouted for the son. Premchand was frightened and hid himself. The mother, however, searched him out and gave him a thrashing.

"Why did you chop off the lobe of that boy?"

"I merely gave him a haircut."

"But don't you see that he is bleeding?"

"I did what the others were doing, mother."

"Don't repeat this game."

"All right, I won't."

Young Premchand accompanied his parents when his father was transferred from one place to another. When Premchand was three years old, his father was posted in Banda district. Later, he went round various places, e.g. Badahlganj, Azamgarh, Basti, Gorakhpur, Kanpur, Allahabad and Lucknow. It is somewhat difficult to give an account of his stay at these places, because none was kept by the family; and one can only reconstruct the picture by piecing together several bits of information. Of particular interest in this connection are some of the accounts left us by Premchand in some of his short stories written in the first person singular, and corroborated by the accounts given by him to his wife who has recorded them in the biography of her husband. These accounts throw light on his life in his childhood days and early influences.

When Premchand's father was posted at Jamnia, in Azamgarh *Tehsil*, there was a postal runner (courier), Qazaki by name, who

was fond of Premchand and who would give him eatables and fruits.

A *Pasi* by caste, Qazaki was a happy go lucky fellow—full of life and vitality. Every evening he would bring in the mail bag, stay the night and return with the mail the following morning—in the opposite direction. Throughout the day, Premchand, who was attached to him, would wait for him anxiously. At four o'clock in the afternoon he would go out on the road and see Qazaki return, running with the staff on his shoulder and the bells fastened to it ringing. When Qazaki would see Premchand, he would quicken his pace, his bells would ring louder; Premchand's heart would beat faster, and he would run towards Qazaki and in no time be seated on Qazaki's shoulders—his throne and the haven of his desires. When Qazaki would start running, it would seem to Premchand that he was flying "in the air on the back of a winged horse." The world would grow small and contemptible.

Before Qazaki reached the post office, he would be oozing out perspiration. Still he would not rest; for, as soon as he put down the mail bag, he would take the children into the fields, play with them, sing songs, or tell them blood-curdling stories of thefts and depredations, of battles, violence, ghosts and witches. As Premchand would listen to these stories, he would be overcome with wonder and ecstasy. The thieves and robbers of the stories were heroes who would rob the rich to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and the unhappy. Instead of hating these characters, he actually admired them.

One day the sun was down, but there was no sign of Qazaki. Like a lost soul, Premchand watched the road for him but Qazaki's familiar figure was not to be seen. Dusk descended, Premchand's hopes faded.

When at last Qazaki arrived, young Premchand beat him, and stood away from him to express his displeasure.

"I have brought something," said Qazaki laughingly. "If you beat me, I won't give it to you."

"Don't give it to me," replied Premchand sharply. "I won't take it."

"If I show it to you," said Qazaki, "you will simply run and hold it in your lap."

"All right," said Premchand, "show it to me."

"First you must come and sit on my shoulder," said Qazaki. "I am very late today; and Babuji (the postmaster) must be very angry with me."

Premchand was adamant—and won. Qazaki forgot about his lapse and thought he could afford to spare another minute or two.

The present he carried was a young deer. The child ran and snatched it from Qazaki's hands. With the young thing next to his bosom, Premchand ran towards home, the contact of its soft skin creating a pleasing sensation.

The two reached the post office. The postmaster was furious and shouted at Qazaki.

"The *dak* is already gone," he said. "What shall I do with the mail bag now?"

Qazaki did not utter a single word.

"Perhaps you no longer wish to continue in this job," added the postmaster. "Once the bellies of you menials are full, you become lazy louts. Starvation alone will teach you a lesson."

Qazaki still stood silent.

The postmaster's temper rose. "All right," he said. "Put down the bag and go home. You, son of a pig, you bring the *dak* at this late hour because you think that you stand to lose nothing and that you can earn something anywhere you work. But I . . . I have to answer for your laziness."

"I shall never be late again," said Qazaki, his eyes full of tears.

"Why were you late today?" asked the irritable postmaster. "Answer that first."

Qazaki still had no reply to give. The wonder of it was that his young friend too had become tongue-tied.

Poor Qazaki was sacked on the spot. His staff, his turban and his belt, all were taken away from him. He was told peremptorily to quit the office.

At that moment young Premchand wished he had wealth to offer to Qazaki in order to show to his father that Qazaki was none the worse for his summary dismissal. Wasn't Qazaki proud of his belt as any hero of his sword?

While Qazaki was taking off his belt, his hands trembled and tears flowed from his eyes. The source of all the trouble in this case was the gentle creature which sat comfortably with its

face hidden in the child's lap, as though he were its mother. Qazaki left. Premchand walked behind him trying to suppress his own tears.

"I am not going to a distant place," said Qazaki, "and shall come here to give you joy rides on my back. Babuji has taken away my job, but he will certainly allow me this little pleasure. I won't leave you. Tell mother that Qazaki is leaving and she should forgive me for all my faults."

A report was made to the mother. "Babuji has turned out Qazaki and taken away his turban and staff—also his belt."

"That's bad," said the mother. "He is a good worker. Why has your father turned him out?"

"He was late today," said Premchand exhibiting the deer. "It ran so fast, mother, that none other than Qazaki could have caught it. It ran like the wind. Qazaki chased it for five or six hours before he could catch it. And no one in the world can run like Qazaki. That's how he got delayed—a delay for which father dismissed him and took away his belt, his turban and his staff. What will the poor fellow do now? He will have to starve!"

"Where is Qazaki?" asked the mother. "Call him in."

"He is standing outside. He asked me to ask you, Ammaji, to forgive him for all his faults. . . ."

But Qazaki was nowhere to be seen.

The following evening approached. Young Premchand went out, again stood on the road waiting for Qazaki—and saw him coming. He returned, and while the mother was lighting the lamps, he quietly took out a little flour in a basket and ran outside, his hands covered with flour. When he had just taken up his position, he saw Qazaki approaching. He had a staff of his own, a belt round his waist and a turban on his head. The staff also had a mail-bag dangling from its end.

"What is this flour for?" asked Qazaki.

"I have brought it for you," replied the child with some embarrassment. "You must be hungry. Did you eat today?"

"My young friend," said Qazaki, his throat choked with emotion, "am I to eat bread only? I need pulses, salt and ghee. And there is none of these here!"

"I shall get you pulses and salt. But will you come here every day?"

"Why shouldn't I come," said Qazaki, "if you give me food to eat?"

"I shall give you food every day," said the child.

"Then I too shall come every day," replied Qazaki.

Premchand rushed and brought all his savings for Qazaki. ("Had I possessed a precious jewel, say like the Kohinoor, I would not have hesitated to present it to him, to induce him to come to me daily.")

"How did you get this money?" asked Qazaki.

"It is mine," replied the child proudly.

"Your mother will beat you," said Qazaki. "She will say: 'Qazaki must have persuaded you to give it to him!' My little friend, go and buy some sweets for yourself with this money and put the flour back into its pot. I am not starving. My limbs are strong. Why should I starve?"

When the child went into the house, the mother pounced on him.

"Where did you take the flour, you thief," she shouted. "You are now learning how to steal! Tell me, to whom did you give that flour! Otherwise I shall flay you alive."

The child was speechless. She threatened him and cajoled him.

Then, all of a sudden Qazaki was heard saying: "Bibiji, the flour is at the doorstep. The young one had brought it to give it to me."

Mother went out and came back into the house with the basket emptied. She went into her room, took something out of the box and again returned to the door. She called several times for Qazaki, but—he had gone.

"Shall I go mother, and look for him?" asked the child.

"He was here a moment ago!" she said closing the door. "Where would you look for him in the dark? I had myself asked him to wait a while till I returned. And he has slipped away. He is indeed very shy. He wasn't accepting even the flour. With great difficulty I tied it up in his scarf. I feel pity for him. Who knows whether he has anything in his house to eat. I was going to give him some money. But look at him. He has disappeared."

Before dusk, on the following day, young Premchand again went out and stood on the road. Darkness descended, but there was no sign of Qazaki. Lamps were lit and the road became

gradually quiet and was deserted, but Qazaki did not come. Premchand cried bitterly. The mother hugged him to her bosom. Even her own voice was choked.

"Be quiet, son," she said. "I shall send a runner and call Qazaki tomorrow."

The following day Qazaki was not at his house. He had not returned home the previous night. His wife was wondering where he had gone away and was weeping. She feared he might have run away.

Qazaki was not seen for another couple of days. Yet another few days went by. Then at noon one day while the postmaster was having his meal and his son was busy tying brass bells to the feet of the deer, came a woman with a veil on. She stood in the courtyard. Her clothes were torn and dirty. But one could see that she was pretty.

"Little one, where is your mother?" she asked of Premchand. "I have brought these lotus roots for you. I believe you are very fond of them. Aren't you?"

"Where have you brought them from?"

"Your runner has sent them," said the woman.

Hearing the conversation, mother also came out of the kitchen. The woman touched her feet. "Are you Qazaki's wife?" the mother asked her.

The woman bowed her head.

"What is Qazaki doing these days?" asked mother.

The woman started crying. "He has been lying ill, Bahuji, since the day he took the flour from you. He keeps crying for the little one all the time. His whole being is wrapped up in Bhaiya. He gets up and runs to the door shouting 'Bhaiya.' Heaven knows what has come over him. The other day, he left home without saying anything to me and looked at Bhaiyaji hiding himself in a lane. And when Bhaiyaji saw him, he ran away. He feels embarrassed to come to you."

"You see mother," said the child. "I told you that day that I chased him and missed him."

"Have you got provisions in the house?" asked mother.

"Yes, Bahuji," said the woman. "We have. And there is no trouble on that account . . . He got up this morning and, although weak, went to the tank. I implored him not to go out lest his condition should worsen. But he would not listen. His

legs kept trembling. Yet, he waded deep into the pool and picked up these lotus roots. 'Take these and give them to Bhaiya,' he said. 'He is very fond of lotus roots. And enquire of his welfare!'

"Tell him that he is well," said the mother. Said the postmaster: "And also inform him that the *Sahib* has reinstated him in his job. He should join at once, lest someone else should be engaged."

"Has he really been reinstated in his job?" asked Premchand's mother of the father.

"What else?" said the postmaster. "Do you think I would send for him on false pretences? I had recommended his reinstatement on the fifth day."

"This is a good turn that you have done him," said mother.

"This is the only treatment for his lousiness," said the postmaster.

Next morning when young Premchand got up, he saw Qazaki limping along with the support of his staff. He had grown very weak and looked aged. His young friend ran towards him and embraced him. Qazaki kissed him on the cheeks and tried to lift him and seat him on the shoulder, but could not bear the weight. He lay on fours on the ground, like a beast of burden, and the child rode on his back from the house to the post office. His joy at that moment was unfathomable. And Qazaki perhaps was happier than the child.

The child was not destined to have the two friendships; for when he got Munnoo, the deer, he lost Qazaki. Now that Qazaki had returned, he lost Munnoo—which was killed by a dog.

AJAIBLAL'S CONNECTION WITH Lamhi village was an intimate one. As the head of the family, he not only sent money to a very large number of dependants, but also visited the ancestral house in connection with one family affair or the other, or on leave when his son also came to the village with him. His was a joint family. And Premchand himself said that with four cousins, he was the fifth male child in the house at Lamhi. "So, whenever someone asked me, I always said that we were five brothers." One of these cousins, Balbhadra, studied with him at the village school.

Premchand's early schooling was in a neighbouring village to which he went whenever he was in Lamhi.

As in most *Kayastha* families, his early education was in Urdu and Persian. The teacher was a *maulvi* who, in fact, was a tailor and did teaching work only incidentally. His pupils would act as his agents also. An account of how he functioned is given in a short story entitled *Chori*.

An interesting fact in regard to the school is that the *maulvi* kept no attendance register. Consequently, if some students played truant, there was no record. There was no system of fine for truancy either. It was not unusual, therefore, for the pupils to absent themselves from the school and indulge in a game of *gulli danda*, chew sugarcane or eat sweetened peas. And Premchand and his cousin who was older than him by two years, were no exceptions. They would stop in front of the police station, watch the constables parade, or pass the whole day following the *madari* displaying the pranks of the tamed bear or the monkey, or make their way to the railway station fascinated by the trains in motion. "What we knew of the train-timings was nobody's business—not even the time table's."

On the way to the school was a garden. A well, being sunk there, was a site of great interest. The old gardener would seat



them affectionately in his hut and they would vie with him to do some of his job—water the plants, dig plots of land or prune the creepers. The gardener would get work out of them, and still appear to oblige them!

At times the two children would absent themselves from the school for weeks on end. When questioned, they would put forward such excuses that the maulvi's twitched eyebrows would relax. The two acted as the "travelling agents" for the maulvi who would get some work through their efforts and feel happy. Sometimes when they had no good excuse to offer, they would take some little gifts to the maulvi: half a seer or so of beans, or half a dozen sugarcanes, or the green sheaves of wheat or barley; and, as the the maulvi saw these gifts, his anger would disappear. If these crops were not in season, they would take to other stratagems to escape punishment. They would show great enthusiasm in grinding grams or catching moths for the sparrows, *shyamas*, *bulbuls*, *dahyials* and *chandools* kept by the maulvi in cages in the school.

One morning, we are told, Premchand and his cousin went to the village tank to wash their faces. The cousin showed Premchand a rupee coin held tight in his fist. Taken aback, Premchand asked him whence he had got the rupee.

"Mother had kept it in a niche," he said. (There was no almirah or box in the house. All the money was, therefore, placed in a niche high up in the wall. The previous day Premchand's uncle had sold jute, and had kept the money which was to be paid to the *zamindar* in the niche.)

"How did you get it?"

"I used the cot as a ladder and took it."

Until that day Premchand had never even "felt" a rupee coin. A rupee coin to him was something beyond his imagination. For, even the maulvi got only six annas a month from him, and it was paid to him at the end of the month by the uncle personally, since even for this little amount the children were not trusted. With a rupee they felt like the "crowned kings."

After the wash the two returned home and entered the house quietly. Had there been a search at that stage, God only would have been their saviour. But everyone was busy and none spoke to them. They missed the breakfast of *chapattis* left overnight,

missed even the *chabena* of peas and barley, took the books and made for the school, determined that they would spend the rupee in a manner so as to last the longest number of days.

The best of sweets in those days could be had at five annas a seer, and the two of them could not have eaten more than half a seer. "If we ate sweets," they thought, "the rupee's end would soon be seen." They, therefore, decided to eat something which would be tasty, filling and also inexpensive, and went in for guavas which were so cheap that they got some twelve for half an anna.

When the cousin placed the rupee coin on the hand of the *khatikan* (green groceress), she eyed them with suspicion.

"Where did you get this rupee, Lala?" she asked. "Have you stolen it?"

"We have to pay the maulvi's fees," said Premchand, "and as there was no change in the house, my uncle gave us the rupee." This reply removed the *khatikan*'s suspicion and she gave them the guavas. The two now sat on a culvert and relished them.

The problem now was where to keep the fifteen and a half annas. For, although it would have been easy to hide a rupee coin, it was difficult to hide a pile of coins. After a good deal of thought it was decided that twelve annas should be paid to the maulvi for his fees and the remaining three and a half annas spent on sweets. The two then reached the school—after several days' absence.

"Where have you been all these days?" asked the maulvi in anger.

"There was mourning in the house, Maulvi Saheb," Premchand said. And saying this he placed the sum of twelve annas before the maulvi. It was the end of further questioning. The maulvi was very happy because there were still several days to go before the end of the month. While ordinarily he got his fees long after the expiry of the month, and that too after a number of reminders, here was a case when he got the money several days in advance. Not unnaturally, it was a matter of deep satisfaction.

The uncle meanwhile detected the theft, came to the school and took the children out to question them sternly. "Have you stolen a rupee?" he asked.

"Yes," said Premchand's cousin, "Dhanpatrai stole it."

"Where is it?"

"We have used it to pay the maulvi's fees."

The uncle went to the maulvi to verify the statement. "Have they paid you the fees?" he asked.

"Yes, they have."

"Give it to me."

The maulvi returned the amount. Premchand's uncle questioned the children about the balance. "We have spent it on guavas and delicacies," they told him. Thereupon he dragged them home and gave a thrashing to his own son. Premchand's mother, who saw the uncle beating his own son, started beating Premchand too. The aunt ran to save him. "Why she preferred to save me from beating rather than her own son, I don't know. Maybe, she took pity on my weak health."

Premchand was a weakling. His mother, Anandi Devi, "who was as affectionate—and when occasion arose, as stern—as all good mothers are," was doubly fond of him. But she was not destined to live long.

In fact, being the first son born after three daughters (*Tehtar*), the child was supposed to bring bad luck to either the mother or the father, or both. He brought bad luck to both, first to the mother and later to the father.

For, when Premchand was eight years old, his mother was confined to bed with amoebic dysentery. Her illness lasted over six months. While his cousin arranged for the medicines, Premchand sat by the mother's side. (Close to her bed lay a jar full of *shakkar*, and when she went off to sleep, he would help himself to it.) Anandi Devi's prolonged illness brought to Allahabad the recently married Suggi from her in-laws and Ajaiblal's mother from Lamhi. The illness proved fatal.

Before she went to eternal sleep, she took Suggi's, Premchand's and his cousin Baldevlal's hands, put them into Ajaiblal's, and said, "I leave these children to you; you have to look after them." Came her end. Ajaiblal wept. So did Suggi, as also Premchand's cousin. Premchand could not, however, understand why they were weeping. He experienced the loss later, and all over his works we find tender tributes to motherhood.

A few days after Anandi Devi's death, Suggi left for her husband's house. Some two or three months later, Ajaiblal's

mother who told the children interesting stories, also took ill and left for Lamhi. Those left behind now were Ajaiblal, Premchand and his cousin. The latter would give Premchand milk sweetened with shakkar, and Premchand now would miss his mother's affection and would shed tears as he felt lonely.

When five or six months later, Ajaiblal took ill, he returned to Lamhi along with the children. Premchand's routine returned to the old one, studying at the maulvi's or absen<sup>ting</sup> himself for playing gulli danda, chewing sugarcane and eating sweetened peas.

A few months later, Ajaiblal was transferred to Jimanpur. Premchand and his grandmother accompanied him, the cousin by then having left for Indore.

Ajaiblal rented a house at Rs. 1½ per month and Premchand was given a small room on top of the main entrance to the house. The room was directly accessible from outside. Ajaiblal was busy in the office and took little interest in the son. Premchand would slip away to the house of a schoolmate whose father was a tobacconist. Sitting behind mounds of tobacco, the tobacconist and his friends would smoke and attentively listen to the recitation of *Tilism-i-Hosh Ruba*. So would young Premchand.

Premchand's unrestricted freedom, however, could not continue for long. His father did not relish the life of a widower and married again. This did not have the approval of others in the house, including his own mother and his daughter, Suggi, who left for her husband's place. Ajaiblal's mother also left him and went back to Lamhi, to die there. Premchand, however, had to stay with his father.

Ajaiblal's second wife brought with her Vijay Bahadur, her younger brother, who was younger than Premchand. She would favour him and be unkind to the stepson and make him do various household chores. Ajaiblal knew of the treatment meted out by his wife to her stepson, but was helpless.

On his way back from the office, Ajaiblal would buy some fruits or desserts for the family, but his wife would like him alone to eat all that he would bring. Ajaiblal would get annoyed. "I bring these for the children," he would say, "give it to them." And when his wife would resist, he would walk out of the house in anger.

Once a friend of Ajaiblal, the "Bade Babu," told Premchand that he was going weak and should drink more milk and eat more *ghee*. "Does not your mother give you enough to eat?"

Premchand was reminded of his mother. He appreciated the affection now being showered on him by an outsider, and wept. The "Bade Babu" hugged him. "Don't weep, my son, I understand."

The "Bade Babu" mentioned it to Ajaiblal who passed it on to his wife. The following day, therefore, the stepmother put a lump of raw *ghee* in Premchand's *dal*.

"Why have you put unmelted *ghee*?" asked Premchand. "Why anyway have you put *ghee* into the *dal*?"

"Because you go about from door to door saying that you get nothing to eat."

"I have not said anything of the type to anyone."

"If you have not said it, would they go about complaining to your father on their own? Of your own volition, you don't eat enough, and then bring me a bad name."

"I have said nothing in this regard to anyone."

"You are a liar," said the stepmother.

Premchand could only weep and remember his mother.

Not long afterwards, Ajaiblal was transferred to Gorakhpur, and Premchand got admission into the eighth class in the Mission High School. Here, as in Jimanpur, the room given to him was again on top of the main entrance to the house and thus directly accessible from outside. Ajaiblal never bothered whether or not the son stayed at home. ("The parents in those days perhaps had a different conception of duty towards their children.")

The stepmother, who now had a son of her own, Gulabrai—and, subsequently, Mahatabrai—was tight-fisted. Premchand would get barely three-fourths of a rupee every month for his entire expense. He would spend part of it as pocket expense (he had a sweet tooth), part on fees, and the rest on the poorer section of his classmates living in his own *mohalla*. He would usually run short of money. It would then become difficult for him to pay even the school fees, but he dared not ask his father for more. And if he asked his stepmother, she would lose her temper. He would, therefore, remember and cherish the memory of his mother all the more.

The stepmother's influence on Premchand was unhealthy. The young wife of an old man, she would discuss intimate details of married life with the landlady, an *Ahir* widow, within Premchand's hearing. The boy would listen attentively, and, at the tender age of thirteen, "knew certain facts of life which would normally ruin a young man's life." He also took to smoking—secretly.

Premchand's hobbies at Gorakhpur were gulli danda and kite-flying. The first cost precious little but the second was beyond his means. As he had little money, he and Vijay Bahadur would go to the Balé Mian maidan and chase kites that were falling, grab them and then fly them. A glimpse of this is had in one of his stories entitled *Bade Bhai Saheb*.

A favourite diversion would be the annual *Ramlila* which would arouse his interest. He would like to be close to those who played the part of Rama, Lakshmana and Sita, and would give all the eatables and cash that he could lay his hands on to Rama. "If he talked to me, I would consider myself to be supremely blessed, and would feel as if I were in the seventh heaven."

There was only one make-up expert who would do the make-up on all the three actors by turn. To bring water, to grind the colours into paste and to fan the actors—this was Premchand's assignment. When after all the other ceremonies, he would be allowed to sit at the back of Rama on the carriage, he would derive great pleasure, "feel proud and experience a thrill which was much more than what one would get now if one were to be seated honourably in the Governor's *darbar*. . . ." He had immense faith in Rama. Older than himself in age, but junior to him at school, Premchand would give him lessons, lest he should fail.

The best relaxation at Gorakhpur, however, was a perusal of novels. He read voraciously and finished "several hundreds" of them borrowed from a bookseller named Budhilal. Premchand would sell copies of "Keys" and "Notes" of English books among the students and in exchange borrow novels to take home and read.

Works of Maulana Sharar, Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshar, Mirza Rusva, Maulvi Mohammed Ali of Hardoi, who were the popular novelists of the period, were his favourites. When he got one of

their books he would forget all about his studies and would not rest until he had read it from beginning to end.

He also read several volumes of *Tilism-i-Hosh Ruba*—the monumental and interminable tale of romance (in seventeen volumes, each one of at least 2,000 pages of super-royal size), believed to have been written originally in Persian by Faizi for Akbar's entertainment.

Of special interest and his favourites, however, were the translations of Reynold's novels which appeared in quick succession and sold like hot cakes.

Premchand's vast reading of these numerous tales of romance awakened his sub-conscious and in fact provoked him into indulging in "pen-pushing." He would write pages after pages, and then tear them off. Sometimes, his father would go to his room and glance at what he had written. "Are you composing something, Navab?" he would ask. Premchand would blush at the question.

Writing on how he was led to his "first composition," Premchand says that the uncle of a relative of his used to visit his father now and then. Of medium height and wheatish complexion, he had a strong physique and long moustaches. A hemp addict, his eyes were invariably red. In his own way, he was religious too and offered an oblation of water every day to Lord Shiva and abstained from eating fish or fowl. "It is indeed somewhat surprising that he was not married." Long past the age of adolescence, he used to curse his fate. His small landed estate and his house, he felt, were of little value to him. He wished to get married and visited one relation after another. None, however, could arrange a match for him.

Frustrated in life, the uncle seduced a *chamarin* who used to visit his house to make cow-dung cakes, to feed the bullocks and to do other odd jobs. The *chamarin* was young and impetuous. She always had a ready smile. The uncle would make advances to her and she would indulge in coquetry, "doing up her hair with an extra dose of oil, even though it be of mustard, brightening her eyes with eyeblack and painting her lips." Taking advantage of her charms, she became lazy and would at times only peep into the house for a while, cast a glance at him and then go away without doing much work. The uncle had, therefore, himself to attend to the bullocks and do other items

of work. He could now ill-afford to displease her. On the occasion of festivals, he would present her with *saris* of rich and costly material as also handsome tips. The maidservant became practically the mistress of the house.

The *chamars* who felt outraged, held a meeting of their *panchayat*. Affluence or influence of the seducer, they said, would not deter them from pursuing the right path. As persuasion might not succeed and indeed could create an embarrassing situation, they decided to set the whole thing right at one stroke—by teaching him a lesson that he would never forget.

So, when the maidservant entered the house the following evening and he closed the door from inside, the *chamars*, only waiting for such an opportunity, got together and knocked at the door. The uncle first thought that probably one of his tenants had come to see him, and that, finding the door shut, he would return home to come back again. When, however, he heard persistent noise created by the crowd, he looked out of the key-hole. About twenty to twenty-five *chamars*, all armed with sticks, were trying to break open the door. What was to be done? He could not hide the *chamarin*. And there was also no escape for him.

The noise outside the house grew. All the *Brahmins*, the *Thakurs*, the *Kayasthas* had collected to watch the fun and also to give a good hiding to the delinquent. The village carpenter was sent for and he broke open the door. No sooner was the door opened than the *chamarin* ran out. None said a word to her. The uncle hid himself in the fodder-store ready to receive whatever punishment might be meted out to him. And the punishment he got was indeed thorough. Umbrellas, sticks, shoes, fists, legs—anything and everything that one could lay one's hands on—was used to beat him up right until he became unconscious. News of this event reached Ajaiblal and his son who enjoyed it. He tried to picture to himself the expressions on the face of the uncle being belaboured by the villagers, and laughed heartily.

For nearly a month, the uncle was in bed. Molasses and turmeric were administered to him. No sooner was he able to move about a bit, he went over to Ajaiblal's. What he wanted was to file a suit against his fellow villagers for an assault on him.

The uncle showed no remorse or humility. He was as proud as ever and threatened to report to Ajaiblal on Premchand's pas-



sion for novels. Having discovered a black spot in the uncle's character, Premchand was not prepared to yield to him or to be browbeaten. In fact, he wove out a play around all that had befallen the poor uncle, and read it out to his own friends. They all had a hearty laugh. This encouraged Premchand. He made out a fair copy, and kept it under the uncle's pillow before going to school.

As soon as the school closed, Premchand, impatient to know the uncle's reaction, ran for the house, even though he feared lest the uncle should give him a severe beating.

But, lo and behold! The uncle was not there. There was no trace of his shoes, or his clothes, or his belongings. He had gone home on some "urgent work" and had left without taking his meals.

Premchand searched for his play—his first ever composition—but could not find it anywhere.

Premchand did not meet this uncle again. In fact a little later when he was in the ninth class, he had himself to leave Gorakhpur—Ajaiblal had been transferred to Jimnia which had no educational facilities—and go back to Lamhi along with the stepmother.

The nearest school now was the Collegiate High School at Banaras. It was about five miles from Lamhi and Premchand had to trudge this distance every morning. For his lunch he took *chabena* and some *gur* which his stepmother would give him. Throughout the day he would be in the city. Then followed the return on foot. By the time he returned home he would be tired. Yet he had to do his home-task—in the light of a tiny kerosene oil lamp.

Premchand's monthly allowance was five rupees. Of this, two rupees went towards the school fees, one rupee towards milk, and the remaining two were not enough for books, clothes, etc. But he dared not ask for more. His father earned only about forty rupees a month. And the stepmother was a terror.

A picture of Premchand's financial straits is given by the fact that once when his father sent him Rs. 5 and asked him to purchase *gur*, he bought it, but began to consume it himself along with his cousin and his friends. Two seers of *gur*, we are told, would disappear every day. Seeing that the stock was being consumed fast, he took a vow that neither he nor any of his

friends would touch it. The habit, however, had taken root, and he could not stick to his word. In desperation, he dropped the key of the gur container behind the door cornice. This, he thought, would save it. When, however, the friends got together they persuaded Premchand. He broke his vow. The key was taken out and the gur stock began to be consumed again. When the stock was reduced to about half, Premchand was worried and threw the key into a well! Ajaiblal returned home, and asked about the gur. The key was "missing." The lock had, therefore, to be broken open, to reveal that half the stock had disappeared. The stepmother was furious. The father presumably took it somewhat kindly, because he had ordered it in connection with Premchand's marriage.



## Marriage and Tribulations

ALTHOUGH AJAIBLAL WAS a "thoughtful person and he normally walked on the road of life with his eyes wide open," by marrying again when he was sick and old, he "stumbled" and created problems which he left for his son to solve. Worse still, he got his son married. The son, Premchand, then barely fifteen, was preparing for his annual examination of the ninth class. By arranging his son's marriage, Ajaiblal created responsibilities for which his young son's shoulders were not broad enough. From the very start the marriage was doomed to failure.

The girl Premchand was married to was the daughter of a *zamindar* of Ramavapur Sarkari near Mehndawal in Basti District, and the marriage seems to have been fixed by the father of Premchand's stepmother. The youth hardly knew what he was being pushed into. He was happy and felled bamboos for the *mandap*—the marriage ceremony was traditional—liked everything, including the jokes by the village women at his expense.

The couple travelled back home by a camel-driven cart. When, however, it arrived at the house of the bridegroom, the bride alighted first and caught hold of the husband's hand. This sort of thing was unknown in village society. Eyebrows were raised. Premchand himself felt embarrassed. And to make matters worse, the wife was dark and ugly; her face covered with small-pox marks. One of her shoulders was higher than the other, and she limped. She was also older in age. "When I saw her face," says Premchand, "I had the creeps."

Ajaiblal did not mince matters. He told the son's stepmother that her father had pushed the "rose-like son" (by the first wife) "into the well." He also decided that his son should marry again.

Mrs. Premchand was sharp-tongued and when the haughty stepmother of the husband tyrannized her, she shouted back. The mutual bickerings made Premchand's life miserable. It was

a relief, therefore, when Ajaiblal, on transfer to Jimnia, took his own wife and the daughter-in-law with him, leaving Premchand with the uncle's family at Lamhi. But the relief was short lived.

When, six months later, Ajaiblal was again transferred—to Lucknow—he left his family at Lamhi. Premchand was again caught in the bickerings between the two women.

To add to his woes, Ajaiblal, a chronic patient of amoebic dysentery, returned to Lamhi for treatment. His six months' illness cost the family its entire savings. And when Ajaiblal, 56, died, it was with difficulty that his last rites were performed.

With the family coffers empty, it was Premchand's lot to support not only his own wife, but also the stepmother and her two sons, and also to prosecute his studies further. The only way open to him to earn was by coaching junior pupils privately. The headmaster of the school obliged by giving him a freeship. This, however, could not hold out a bright prospect for the future and his ambitions—of taking an M.A. degree and of becoming a lawyer—became utopian. It was like wanting to "climb the Everest with one's feet bound with chains wrought, not in iron but, in the heaviest-known metal."

With the Matriculation examination ahead of him, the young man, clothed in tatters, his feet bare, would leave the village for the school before eight in the morning—and it was rarely that he would reach in time—leave the school at 3-30 P.M., walk to *Bans ka Phatak* to coach a boy, be free at 6 P.M. and walk fast some five miles back to the village, seldom reaching there before 8 P.M. Tired by excessive work, harassed by the complaints of his wife and his stepmother, he would have a quick dinner, sit down to read in the light of a tiny kerosene lamp, and before long, fall asleep. It was in such trying circumstances that he passed his Matriculation examination—in the second division.

With only a second division, he was not entitled to a freeship at college. Admission to the Queen's College, Banaras, was, therefore, out of his reach.

The Hindu College, started in Banaras that very year, was a ray of hope. Desirous of entering it, he went to the house of Mr. Richardson, the Principal. Dressed in *dhoti* and *kurta*, the principal who sat on the floor, was engaged in writing.

After listening to Premchand's request—and the latter had said only a part of what he had to say—the principal told him peremptorily that he did not discuss matters pertaining to college affairs at home. Premchand was asked to meet him at the college the following day.

When, however, Premchand went to the college, he was told that he could not get a freeship. This appeared to be the end. But Premchand did not lose heart. He felt that if he could bring some eminent person's influence to bear upon the college authorities, his request for a freeship might still be conceded. Everyday, therefore, Premchand would leave his house early, trek about twelve miles and return home late in the evening—a disappointed man. When one day, he went to Thakur Indra Narain Singh, a member of the managing committee of the Hindu College, and told him his tale of woe, the Thakur took pity on him and gave him a letter of recommendation. Premchand returned home elated and determined to meet the principal on the following day.

No sooner, however, did he reach his house than he got fever which continued for a full fortnight. He drank concoctions of *neem*—to the point of disgust—but the fever continued. One day, while he sat at his doorstep, the village priest who was passing by, enquired of his welfare. When young Premchand told him of his predicament, the priest went into the fields closeby and brought some herbs which, along with a few corns of black pepper, were ground and administered to him. "The medicine wrought a miracle; it seemed to catch the fever by the neck before it was to overpower me after about an hour." He soon recovered and was ready once again to pursue the question of his admission to the college.

When, however, Premchand met the principal of the Hindu College, and showed him the letter of recommendation dated a month earlier, the principal, somewhat intrigued, fixed his gaze on Premchand and asked him where he had been all these days.

"I was ill," said Premchand.

It was natural for the principal to ask: "What was the ailment?"

Unprepared for this question, and feeling that fever was such a mild ailment that it could not justify prolonged delay, Premchand thought of mentioning an ailment the hardship of which

would arouse pity. He knew of none. The only serious ailment he could think of was the one mentioned by Thakur Indra Narain Singh—when Premchand had gone to him for the recommendation for a freeship—viz. palpitation of heart.

“Palpitation of the heart, Sir,” said Premchand to the principal.

The principal was amused. “Are you all right now?” he asked. “Yes, Sir.”

“Fill in the application form for admission.”

Thinking that he had won, Premchand got the form, filled it in and submitted it to the principal who wrote on the application form: “To be put to test for his ability.”

This was a severe ordeal. Premchand had no hope of passing in any subject other than English. He trembled at the very thought of arithmetic and geometry. He had forgotten the little that he had learnt.

But there was no other way out. Believing in luck, therefore, he went into the class room, presented the application form, and sat in the last row. The (Bengalee) professor of English was lecturing on the story of Rip Van Winkle. After the period was over, he put several questions on the day’s lesson, and put “satisfactory” on the application form.

Premchand then went to the (Bengalee) professor of arithmetic and presented his application form again. The Professor put him to test, wherein Premchand failed. The professor, therefore, put down “unsatisfactory.” This remark upset Premchand so much that he did not go to the principal. Instead, he returned home—a disappointed man.

He was, however, still determined to continue his studies, and wished to reseek admission into a college after improving his arithmetic. For this, he thought it necessary to live in Banaras city. This, however, needed some work for subsistence. One of his class-fellows helped him to get an assignment as a private coach to the son of his brother-in-law, a lawyer at Banaras. Premchand shifted to Banaras and lived in a small room above the lawyer’s stable. He bought a small kerosene oil lamp. The only “furniture” he had was a gunny bag. Premchand would cook *khichri* once a day, eat it and then cleanse the utensils.

Most of the time at his disposal was spent in the library, ostensibly for a study of arithmetic. But this, Premchand con-

fesses, was only an excuse. What he, in fact, read in the library was not arithmetic but such novels as *Fasana-i-Azad*, *Chandra-kanta Santati* and Urdu translations of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee's novels. He read as many of them as were available in the library.

Premchand's friendship with the lawyer's brother-in-law enabled him to borrow little sums of money whenever he needed. When he got his monthly wages and had cleared the debts, he would be left with three rupees only for himself and his family. The amount was enough to make him lose control over himself and he was tempted to eat sweets. The temptation would overpower him and lead him to the sweetmeat seller's shop. Half-starved, he would gorge sweets and would not get up till he had eaten two to three annas' worth. Later he would visit his home in the village, give his people the remaining two or three rupees, and return to Banaras empty-handed. He would again start borrowing, which became almost a habit. But there were occasions also when he would feel so shy of borrowing that he would prefer to pass the whole day without food.

While his studies did not make much headway, the mounting inflation—barley was 10 seers to the rupee—increased the burden of his family and dependants. Premchand's income from coaching was uncertain. He, therefore, thought of getting a regular job. But there was unemployment and he did not know how and where to get one. In the meantime, his financial condition became acute every day.

Once, we are told, he took cloth worth two rupees or so, on credit from a draper who saw him pass his way every day and trusted him. When, however, he could not make the payment for two months, Premchand was so ashamed of himself that he ceased going that way, and would take a detour. Such was his financial condition that it took him three years to pay off the draper. On another occasion he borrowed a half-rupee from a labourer (who was known as "Know this, my brother," for this was his mannerism) who lived at the back of the lawyer's house and came to Premchand to take lessons in Hindi. This labourer realised the amount of half a rupee from Premchand in his village—five years later!

On yet another occasion, Premchand had no money for two days, ate only a pice worth of parched grams either because

the shopkeeper refused to lend him anything more, or, may be, because Premchand was hesitant to borrow more. By dusk, however, his hunger was unbearable. He took out his "Key" to Chakravarti's book of arithmetic, which he had bought two years earlier and had somehow just managed to keep, went to the bookseller and sold it at half the price.

As he was stepping down from the shop with a rupee in his pocket, a hefty and moustached man, who had seen him selling the book, asked Premchand where he studied.

"I am no longer studying," said Premchand, "but hope to get admission into some college."

"Are you a matriculate?"

"Yes, I am."

"Don't you want a job?"

"I do want it, but I cannot get one."

The "moustached gentleman," who was the headmaster of the Mission School at Chunargarh, offered to Premchand the job of an assistant teacher at Rs. 18 a month. A job on Rs. 18 per month being very much beyond the frustration-eaten imagination of Premchand, he accepted the offer immediately and felt so happy that he "could not walk straight."

When Premchand went to Chunargarh, he took his stepmother's brother, Vijay Bahadur, along with him. The latter looked after Premchand's "establishment." The bulk of his earnings was sent to his stepmother at Lamhi for expenses on herself, her sons and his own wife. To augment his income, Premchand undertook private coaching which brought him some extra five rupees every month. But he required more. The boarding-house contractor would give him his requirements on credit; and part of his monthly earnings would be spent on clearing off the arrears of the previous month.

The family's bad financial state of affairs is clear from the fact that once when after a visit to Lamhi, lasting four to five days, he asked his stepmother for a few rupees to meet the expenses of a rail journey to Chunargarh for himself and her brother, the stepmother told him there was no money in the house. Premchand had little credit in the village to borrow money. He and Vijay Bahadur, therefore, left for the city sufficiently in advance. There in Banaras he sold his woollen coat (which, he says, he had got stitched at great cost and sacrifice



and which he had kept with the greatest care by using cottons) for only two rupees. That's how he got back to Chunargarh.

A glimpse of Premchand's life as a school teacher is given in a short story entitled *Holi ki Chhutti*. This is what the hero says: "After my Matriculation, I got a teacher's post in a primary school, situated about eleven miles from my home. The headmaster of my school was obsessed with the idea of making school children read during holidays also. The annual examinations were due in April, but as early as January he would raise a hue and cry. The assistant teachers were exempted from taking night classes, but they would not be allowed leave. *Somati Amavas* came and went. *Shivaratri* too came and went (but no leave to go home which I had not visited for months). I, therefore, decided that during the forthcoming *Holi* vacation, I must go home even if it cost me my job. A week before *Holi*, which fell on March 20, I gave an ultimatum to the headmaster that I would be proceeding on leave on the evening of March 19.

"The headmaster tried to explain that I was still young, and that it was difficult in these days to get a job, and still more difficult to retain it. 'Examinations are due in April, and if the school is closed for three or four days, how many boys would get through? Wouldn't a whole year's labours be wasted? Take my advice. Don't go home during these holidays, but go there during any of the holidays after the examinations, e.g. during the Easter holidays. I promise I would not stop you even by a day.' But I was adamant. Neither the headmaster's lecture nor his threats produced any effect on me. When the school closed on March 19, I quietly proceeded home, even without bidding goodbye to the headmaster. For, if I had gone to take leave, he would have stopped me from going home on one pretext or another—totalling up the fees in the register, calculating average attendance, correcting the exercise books of students, etc. as if this was the last act before I proceeded on life's last journey."

Premchand did not remain long at the school at Chunargarh. His attitude towards the British tommies in the cantonment and his independence of outlook precipitated a crisis which led to the dismissal of the young school teacher. He now tried for, and got a job in the district school at Bahraich where he re-

ported for duty as the fifth master on July 2, 1900. His salary was fixed at twenty rupees a month. He stayed at the house of a local Thakur and a glimpse of his stay there can perhaps be seen in his short story *Chamatkar*. Within two and a half months' time, however, Premchand was transferred to Pratapgarh where he served for the next twenty-two months.

His work at Pratapgarh appears to have been satisfactory, and while here he succeeded in making arrangements for teacher's training at the Central Training College, Allahabad, the only institution of its kind in U.P. at that time. The course at the college was for two years, one year for the preparatory class, and another for the Junior Certificated Teacher's diploma. He maintained himself on the stipend and the extra five rupees that he earned from coaching pupils privately, seven rupees being sent to his family at Lamhi.

A fellow teacher-trainee describing Premchand, says: Of medium height, he was a thin and lean man. His grip, however, was strong and if he "stretched out his fingers, it was not easy to bend them." He was dressed simply: an *achkan* or an open-necked longish coat, and pyjamas. His headgear was usually a turban or a cap. He was not at all given to show or artificiality. His voice was of a high pitch. Although he was not the one to take things lying down, he was well behaved, a "true gentleman." Not only was there no row between him and any of the classmates or the staff of the hostel, there was also no known instance when his behaviour with others "deviated from correctitude." He was self-respecting, kind, humane and sympathetic to those in trouble.

He was a good student. He would close his room from inside during the time earmarked for study. During recreation time, however, he would mix freely. He joined a few others, including one Girja Kishore, Assistant Commissioner (Irrigation), and Lalkrishan, to form a "Laughing Club," which held a session daily. As the name indicates, all the members of the club liked laughing. Premchand beat them all, for he laughed full throatedly—peals after peals of laughter in response to which even the cobwebs would vibrate. Fellow members of his club nicknamed him "Bambook."

According to his contemporaries at the college, Premchand was a voracious reader. He finished, for instance, a four-volume

history of India by Zakaullah Dehlvi, in a few days and with great care "as if he were writing a literary criticism." It is also not without significance that he cultivated the friendship of Sacchidanand Sinha, then a Bar-at-Law and Secretary of the Kayastha Pathshala, for the use of the latter's personal library!

Apart from reading, Premchand had started dabbling in writing—for Urdu weekly and monthly journals—articles and a novel.

In April 1904, Premchand passed his "permanent Junior English Teacher's Examination" in the first division. He also passed the special vernacular examination, in Urdu as well as in Hindi, of Allahabad University.

Premchand's conduct, according to the principal, was "satisfactory." He was "regular and worked earnestly and well." The principal, however, wrote, Premchand was "not qualified to teach mathematics."

The principal of the college, Mr. J.C. Kempster, anyway appears to have been impressed by his work. Nine months after his return to Pratapgarh, Premchand was called back to become the first teacher at the Model School attached to the Central Training College at Allahabad. This meant an honorarium of ten rupees a month in addition to his salary. And it was from here that after three months, i.e. in May 1905, he was sent, on promotion, as Eighth Master in the District School at Kanpur where, as we shall see later, he came into close contact with the editor of *Zamana*.

## Early Novels

THE GROWTH OF the novel in India is generally supposed to have begun in the latter half of the nineteenth century. What started it was the renaissance brought about by various religious-social movements, including the Brahmo Samaj, Arya Samaj and the rise of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, enlivened by the English novels as also novels translated from a few of the European languages. Bengal, where the new forces of national regeneration first raised their head, gave the lead in this field. Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, who wrote several novels on the model of the then popular historical novels in English language, was among the pioneers. He used that technique to portray the Indian scene. His novels marked a new trend and were widely translated into the various Indian languages and were extremely popular. (It is in this author's novel, *Ananda Math*, that India's anthem *Vande Mataram* was first used.) The deep impact of the Bengali novel is proved by the fact that several phrases and colloquial expressions in Bengali got into the Indian languages.

Bharatendu Harishchandra wrote *Purnaprakash aur Chandraprabha*, the first social novel in Hindi. The principal female character of the novel, Chandraprabha, is married to a doddering old man, Dundiraj, the author's aim being the exposure of the evil consequences of unequal marriages and a strong plea for imparting education to girls.

Balkrishan Bhatt, Shrinivas Das, Radhakrishan Das and Radhacharan Goswami also used the novel as a vehicle, but their success in this medium was limited and they were ineffective.

In Urdu, Dr. Nazir Ahmed who had a close understanding of the Muslim middle classes of Delhi, tried to adopt the English novel's technique. Although the characterisation and dialogues are realistic, his novels are loosely constructed. His

approach was circumscribed because he was more of a protagonist of the Muslim values of the pre-1857 era. Though a pioneer in the field of Urdu fiction, he did not make much of an impact.

Another novelist of the same period was Maulana Abdul Halim Sharar who was influenced by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee. Sharar wrote his own novels after his visit to Europe and his aim too was the regeneration of the Muslims of India. He was very popular with the neo-literates. Deeply influenced by Walter Scott's novels, he wrote historical and sociological novels which were rich in adventure. His style was plain and unvarnished and he wove interesting plots. But his knowledge of the emotions of his characters was skin deep, and they failed to make a deep impression largely because they were unconvincing.

Mirza Muhammed Hadi Rusva, Sharar's contemporary novelist, was a class by himself. As he wrote: "My novels are neither tragedies, nor comedies, nor do my heroes sacrifice themselves. And none among them has committed suicide, or suffered the pangs of separation or experienced fulfilment. My novels should, in fact, be considered a mirror of the times." His novel, *Umrao Jan Ada*, woven round the life of a dancing girl, is remarkable for its realistic characterisation and gripping style. It has a unity of structure which is not equalled by many of the works of that time.

As Rusva's novel is characterised by an unparalleled unity of structure, the gripping and attractive writings of Ratan Nath Sarshar, the famous editor of *Avadh Akhbar*, whose *Fasana-i-Azad* was serialised in the journal—printed on loose sheets of white paper as against the brown paper used for the newspaper—are also unrivalled. Sarshar who learnt English in schools and colleges, unlike Nazir Ahmed who studied it privately, and put on western clothes, has portrayed a very wide canvas.

Because of Sarshar's efforts to introduce the element of drama in his works, the characterisation is weak and pale. The style, however, is gripping and captivating and unrivalled for its raciness. The plots are loosely constructed and prolonged, and the narratives noisy. His sense of humour borders on the grotesque and queer, and his language on vulgarity. But the world of his

imagination embraced nearly all walks of life in Lucknow, ranging from nobles to landlords, teachers, *maulvis*, poets, prostitutes and clowns. It was a world of the decadent society of Lucknow which he knew intimately. He portrayed intrigues at the courts of the nobility, the life of the *begums*, the concubines and mock battles. For the first time, perhaps, in Urdu fiction we see lawyers, professors, photographers, journalists, railway officials, theosophists, municipal commissioners who are woven in by this sensitive writer who reacted to the new classes emerging in India under the impact of the West. Sarshar's works thus have a new realism and his character khoji has become immortal in Urdu literature.

The Hindi world of literature had also its share of the romantic tales of adventure. The Hindi counterpart of *Fasana-i-Azad* by Ratan Nath Sarshar, is Deoki Nandan Khatri's *Chandrakanta Santati* in twenty-eight volumes, which is equally gripping. One part of the story leads to another, and the reader's curiosity, sharpened by the new forces of advance in science in the West, eggs him on avidly to complete it.

It is the picture of a grotesque world of princes employing detectives whose plots are sabotaged by counter-moves and, whose tricks are met by counter-tricks. The tricks employed, for instance, are mistaken identities, medicinal herbs that induce sleep, the smelling of narcotics, e.g. *laklaka*. The sequence of events is breath-taking.

To quote from the preface of Khatri's principal work: "The diplomacy employed by royal princes has been described in many novels, but the institution of clever versatile confidantes has not yet been described in detail. These confidantes know how to play, sing, run, wield weapons, act as detectives, and concoct intoxicating drugs. They are clever enough to bring an end to quarrels through their ingenuity and without shedding blood. They are respected for their art and skill. The portrayal of such detectives has not met my eyes. If readers were to enjoy this treat, they will profit immensely; they would not be duped by tricks. It is with this aim that I have penned this novel."

The sensational and thrilling exploits are also contained in the twenty volumes of *Bhut Nath*. It is an interesting fact that many an Urdu-knowing person learnt Hindi only to have access to Khatri's storehouse of romantic tales.

Although Deoki Nandan Khatri is considered a pioneer in Hindi, he was, in fact, preceded by another important novelist, Kishorilal Goswami, who drew heavily on the rich storehouse of Sanskrit literature as well as of the English novels of his time to write on social, historical and romantic themes.

Such, then, was the state of Urdu and Hindi fiction when Premchand was entering the field. As we have seen already, he had read many of the books published in Urdu and Hindi, and also translations from Bengali and English.

Robbed early by fate of the parental love and care, steeped in poverty, crushed under the heavy responsibilities thrust on him as a result of his old father's second marriage to a young girl, undergoing tyrannies of a stepmother who contributed largely to making his married life miserable, young Premchand's troubled and sensitive mind responded to the forces which sought to bring about radical changes in the social, economic and religious fabric of India. While his troubled thoughts ached to be expressed, his vast readings, specially of novels, proved a great help.

He thus started as well as completed a few novels during the time spared by his duties as a teacher in Chunargarh and Pratapgarh, as a teacher-trainee at Allahabad and as a teacher at Kanpur.

Published by and large under the *nom-de-plume* "Navabrai," there is considerable confusion regarding the correct dates of their publication and also regarding their publishers; different authorities have given different versions.\*

\* (1) Mrs. Premchand says that her husband's first novel *Kishna* was published from Allahabad and his second, *Prema*, later called *Vibhav*, in the year of her marriage. (2) Premchand's second son, Amritrai, says that he has been told that his father's first novel was *Shyama* which was a criticism of British rule in India. (*Shyama* may be a distortion of "Suvama.") (3) Daya Narain Nigam, Premchand's closest friend, says that Premchand's first novel in Urdu was *Hum-Khurma-o-Hum Savab*, published in 1907 by Babu Mahadev Prasad Verma, Aminabad, Lucknow, and printed at Hindustani Press, Lucknow, and that the first novel in Hindi was *Pratigya*, written in 1906. (4) Jageshwar Nath Verma "Betaab" says that Premchand's first novel in Urdu was *Pratapchandra* and also that his first novel in Hindi was *Prema*. (5) Peareylal "Shakir" says that *Hum Khurma-o-Hum Savab*, and its Hindi version, *Prema*, were first published in 1905 and his second novel *Kishna* was published from Banaras in 1908.

To make matters worse, Premchand himself has given different dates of the composition and/or publication of his early novels.\*

The earliest novel written by Premchand seems to have been *Asrar-i-Maabid*. Published under the name of "Dhanpatrai, alias Navabrai Allahabadi" and serialised in the *Avaz-i-Khalq*, an Urdu weekly of Banaras, from October 8, 1903 to February 1, 1905. It is a caricature of the Brahmin priestly class.

It opens with a scene in a temple where Bibijan, a prostitute, is singing before Yashodanand, the priest, and his friend Swami Triloki Nath. The two friends are vying with each other for her favours. When the priest makes a suggestion to the prostitute, she slaps him. Triloki Nath is also thrown out. The prostitute leaves the priest's apartment in a huff. A subsequent scene is that of a *Shivaratri* celebration in the temple. The priest is looking for Ramkali. The sensuous wife of a poor and weakling husband, she stays at her father's. The priest does not see her and asks others about her. When the details of his enquiry are reported to Ramkali, she ridicules those who tell her about it, but quietly finds her way into the priest's apartment where she stays in sin and drinks.

One evening, when Ramkali returns home in a drunken state and is told that her husband is there to take her back, she feigns sickness. The husband enters her room and tries to wake her up, but she appears to be senseless. The poor husband sits by her side all through the night. The heavy dose of the smell of alcohol makes him vomit.

Next day Ramkali finds excuses to remain at her father's and so arranges things that her jewellery box is reported "missing." There is a hue and cry and the "loss" of jewellery gives her an excuse to stay behind.

\*(1) Premchand wrote to Imtiaz Ali Taj on January 29, 1921, that *Hum Khurma-o-Hum Savab* and *Kishna* were his earliest novels, written around 1900, that the first was published by Navab Press of Lucknow and the latter by the Medical Hall Press of Banaras. (2) On July 17, 1926, he wrote to Daya Narain Nigam that he got *Prema* published by the Indian Press, Allahabad (in 1904). (3) In February 1932, he wrote in an autobiographical essay in *Hans* that he started writing his first novel in 1901, that one novel was published in 1902. (4) On September 7, 1935, he wrote to Inder Nath Madan that his first book appeared in 1903.



It is natural that she should report her stratagem to the priest, who makes up a story of his impending financial doom in order to extract from her the jewellery which has been reported stolen.

Meanwhile, the prostitute returns home to find that all her hangers-on, who are addicted to opium and *sulfa*, etc. are hungry. She is herself hungry. They ask her if she has brought anything from the priest and she tells them that she would have achieved her wishes if Swami Triloki Nath had not spoilt her plans. They persuade her to part with her necklace of false beads worth half a rupee and go out in their best clothes to sell it. No jeweller or goldsmith would touch it. Through the connivance of Triloki Nath, who is talking to a young shopkeeper, they sell it for twelve rupees (because the buyer is in search of an ornament which has been borne by a family of prostitutes for hundreds of years). Triloki Nath, who stands surety for the *bona fides* of the well-dressed sellers, chases them to receive half the amount from them.

The novel is in fact a loosely arranged jumble of dialogues and many characters, some of them in the mould of Sarshar's "Khoji," and "Ravi." The descriptions too are in the style of Sarshar. There are obscene suggestions and vulgarities, as for instance, in the dialogues between women whose marriages have been uneven.

As the novel was serialised in the manner of Sarshar's *Fasana-i-Azad*, one wonders if Premchand was trying to step into his shoes (Sarshar died in 1902). About the time the last parts of the novel are carried in the Banaras weekly, we find Premchand asking Nigam (on February 20, 1905) for an opinion on his novel sent to Nigam two and a half months earlier.

Another novel written about the same time seems to have been *Pratapchandra*. Frantic efforts to search for this novel have failed, and there appears to be some doubt if it was ever published. The novel, as we shall see later, was possibly revised and enlarged. The same is also true anyway of his next novel published in early 1907 as *Prema* (in Hindi) and a few months earlier as *Hum Khurma-o-Hum Savab* (in Urdu). It is interesting to note that the two versions (Hindi and Urdu) were prepared simultaneously. The translation is literal. The author's name on *Prema* is given as "Babu Navabrai Banarsi," and the pub-

lisher's as the Indian Press, Allahabad, which bought over the copyright.

The sub-title of *Prema*, "The marriage of two friends (girls): gripping, instructive and original novel," gives us an indication of the contents of the novel.

The problems dealt with in the novel are the ills of the Hindu society, e. g. the taboo on widow remarriage. The taboo, according to Premchand, had created a class of helpless women. While some of them maintained their widowhood, there were some others who, under cover of social conventions, indulged in carnality and placed themselves at the disposal of priests, etc. Reform of the Hindu society, according to Premchand, was urgently needed and this could be brought about by people inspired with patriotic and reformist fervour, and the only possible approach was along the lines advocated by the Arya Samaj, of which he was an ardent devotee.

Premchand's mouthpiece appears to be the Arya Samaj preacher, Shri Dhanakdharilal from Punjab, who tells the people that "at the root of all our social evils is our callousness. Our condition is that of a patient on death-bed, who takes into his hands a dose of medicine which might save him, sees it, but does not bring it even close to his lips. Admittedly we have eyes, but we are still blind; we have ears, but we can't hear; we can speak, but are tongue-tied. The times when we did not see our social ills is past. Now we know what is good. However, like some who, despite their belief in the moral law, go astray, or like those who believe in God and yet become atheists—we agree with the urgent need for social reform, but do not act upon it."

The hero of the novel is the idealist young rich lawyer, Amritrai. The novel in fact opens with a scene in Amritrai's house, the hero telling his friend and classmate since childhood, Dan Nath, of the deep impact made on his mind by the lecture of Dhanakdharilal. It is as a result of this impact that Amritrai has decided to devote his life to bring about a reform in the Hindu society. "Determined individuals have conquered empires and laid the foundations of nations." And it is for this noble end that he goes back on his word to marry Prema, the only daughter of the wealthy Badriprasad—and tears her picture to bits. Badriprasad, who is extremely conservative, has given

his daughter education, much against his wish, in English, Hindi and Persian, only because Amritrai is westernised. Westernisation and reforms to Badriprasad mean a deviation from Sanatan Dharma and are tantamount to embracing Christianity.

When Badriprasad comes to know of Amritrai's reformist zeal from Dan Nath, he is deeply grieved and breaks off the engagement of his daughter, Prema, who has been attached to the image of Amritrai in her own mind. She is extremely unhappy and confides all this to her best friend, Purna, the wife of Basant Kumar, a poor Brahmin clerk. The latter, married for two years and deeply attached to his wife, is drowned in the Ganga on a *Holi* day, leaving Purna alone in the world. Amritrai, whose engagement to Prema has been broken off, is building a home for the widows and raises enough money for it. He is also building a *ghat*. It is he who comes to Purna's help. Gradually he gets interested in Purna. His weekly calls on her lead to gossip in the neighbourhood, and Purna, a widow, is told that she must not make up or visit Prema or any other unmarried girl, that she should be true to her widowhood and dress simply and visit the temple regularly. Pressure is put on her by several elderly women, including a *sethani* who has made the life of Ramkali, her widowed daughter-in-law, miserable. Ramkali (a shade different from her name-sake in *Asrar-e-Maabid*) was only 14 when her husband died. She had not seen him till she became a widow. Ramkali attempts to find a way out of her miserable life by spending as much time as possible in "visiting" the temples, the priests and their hangers-on. One day she takes Purna to the Ganga and the temple. The two present a picture of sharp contrast. Ramkali, 16, does not use hair oil, eyeblack, *sindhoor* or tooth whitener; but, even without these, she is attractive and betrays sensuousness, coquettishness and a gait of abandon. Unlike Purna, who would not even raise her eyes, Ramkali would throw meaningful glances and walk provocatively, attracting the attention of thousands of spectators, including priests and *panwallahs* who cut vulgar jokes. The two go to the temple where the chief priest is witnessing a dance by a prostitute. While Purna awaits, Ramkali goes into one of the apartments where a *swami* is closeted with her for a little while, she coming out with her hair and clothes dishevelled. Purna decides never to go there again.

Soon afterwards, the budding reformer Amritrai persuades Purna to marry him. The marriage, against which there is stiff opposition from all conservative sections of society, takes place only under very heavy police and military protection—which the esteemed lawyer has been able to arrange for—and leads to a firing which results in some injuries, that of Zoravar Singh, a leader of the hostile group, being fatal.

Prema, who is still secretly in love with Amritrai, has in the meantime been married to Dan Nath. When the latter comes to know of her attachment to Amritrai, he is perturbed and decides to kill his rival who was once a trusted friend. Prema, who comes to know of Dan Nath's designs, sends advance warning to Purna. The latter, however, does not tell it to Amritrai, and herself gets ready to face the situation. When, therefore, Dan Nath and his accomplices enter Amritrai's house at night, Purna shoots him dead, and is herself shot dead in the scuffle. Within a short period thereafter, Amritrai marries Prema! The latter is happy and kisses the pistol with which Purna had killed Dan Nath! It is on this note that *Hum Khurma-o-Hum Savab* ends.

*Prema's* ending is somewhat different. Amritrai's friends insist on having a party from him, and the novel ends with a verse from Tulsidas, saying that when love between two people is genuine, it must bear fruit.

It is to be noted that, from the very beginning, Premchand was a bilingual writer in Urdu and Hindi. The Hindi world did not take notice of him, but the Urdu version of the novel did attract editorial notice. Wrote the *Zamana* of December 1906: "*Zamana's* readers who read Navabrai's powerful criticism of *Krishan Kunwar* know the degree of the familiarity of our esteemed critic with the principles of fiction writing. This being so, it is unnecessary to explain the qualities of a novel that has been penned by him. *Hum Khurma-o-Hum Savab*, which is his latest and unparalleled work, is not only interesting but also full of ingenuity which deserves a lot of praise. Novels of this standard published in Urdu have been very few. We wish the ordinary lover of novels to get a copy soon and enjoy it and give the author credit for his mental ingenuity and his vast knowledge. The book can be had from the Manager, *Zamana*, for twelve annas."

The publication of Premchand's next novel, *Kishna*, is announced in the *Zamana* of August 1907. The announcement mentions it as the first of the "Indian social reforms series," and of the "excellent plot by the arresting pen of Navabrai."

A review of the book in the *Zamana* of October-November 1907, by "Naqqad Lucknavi," says: "This novel relates to social reform. Its author is the famous essayist of *Zamana*, Munshi Navabrai Banarasi who has excellent command over the art of writing novels. He has caricatured the great love of women for ornaments. In other words, this is the life story of a woman who is not merely in love with ornaments but has it as an obsession. To portray this obsession, the able author has used his clever pen. This obsession, however, does not appear to be genuine, and seems somewhat artificial. Some of the ceremonies connected with a traditional wedding have also been caricatured. In particular, the system of dowry and the coercion in its realisation is undoubtedly a vicious one. Luckily, however, civilised members of society are opposing it as days pass. In civilised circles, in the cities and among other enlightened sections of the people, the system is gradually on the decline. The villagers can also follow the example set by the city-dwellers. This reform is very necessary. Nevertheless, on occasions like marriages, etc. it is necessary to exhibit gaiety and mirth. Otherwise it would be difficult to distinguish marriages from occasions of sorrow, and the spirit of gaiety would disappear gradually from the social fabric of society. That spirit is an essential ingredient of national culture. The language used in the book is not very similar to the one used in his well-known essays. May be, the type of language that has been used is suited to the class of people whom it sets about to reform. What surprises us about the maturity of the writer, relates to the principles of art. He introduces *Kishna* to Dhanakdharilal who has an eminent position among social reformers, in the very first scene. But he fails to perform his duty in regard to poor *Kishna's* obsession for ornaments. The hero has thus failed to rise to the occasion demanded by his position as a reformer. The subtlety of art demanded that, through the efforts of Dhanakdharilal, *Kishna's* obsession for ornaments should have disappeared, and she should become a model for her class. In any case, there is no hero or heroine in this novel. And it is

not apt to call it a novel. In fact, it is no novel at all. It is only a caricature of feminine weakness. As a caricature, then, this work deserves praise."

Copies of *Kishna*, as we have mentioned earlier, are not available. It is believed, however, that Premchand subsequently incorporated the theme into *Ghaban*\* which highlights the evils to which an obsession about ornaments can lead to.

\*Prof. Janardan Prasad Jha "Dwij" who was a pupil of Premchand and was devoted to him, in his book *Premchand Ki Upanyas Kala*, written during Premchand's life time and the first copy of which was proudly presented by the author to Premchand, says: "Before the publication of *Prema*, Premchand had written a novelette in Urdu. It was entitled *Kishna*." It is on the basis of that novel, he adds, that the novel *Ghaban* has been woven.

## Urdu Journalism : New Trends

WHILE PREMCHAND WAS writing novels, he was also making a weighty contribution to the process which was giving a new shape to Urdu journalism. The finest Urdu journal before the end of the last century, it appears, was (Sir) Syed Ahmed's *Tahzib-ul-Akhlaq* which continued from 1287 Hijri to 1293 Hijri (1870 A.D. to 1876 A.D.).

*Adib*, printed at the Mufid-i-Am Press, Agra, and published from Firozabad, in Agra district, was setting a new standard in Urdu periodical journalism. Started in 1899 and edited by Syed Akbar Ali, it was perhaps the best journal published till then. Its paper was good, so was its printing. Its contents also marked a departure from the earlier journals and broke away from the set traditions of the journals providing only cheap humour, poems and some worthless essays. It followed the path of the then current English monthly periodicals. Its twelfth issue (December 1899), for instance, included the following list of contents: *Adib's* programme for 1900; the *Purdah* System; Sven Hedin's Travels in Central Asia; the Life of Samru Begum; Poems; Strange Happenings; Useful Tips; "Remember the Following;" England and India; Advertisements.

*Adib*, which was supposed to have laid the foundations of modern Urdu periodical journalism, was followed by two good periodicals, *Makhzan* (started in 1901) edited by Abdul Qadir, B.A., from Lahore, and its contemporary *Zamana*, edited by Daya Narain Nigam, B.A., from Kanpur.

*Makhzan's* editor not only searched out and encouraged new good writers in Urdu, but also created a readership for Urdu journals. The journal, it has been said, taught Punjabis the art of writing good Urdu. The majority of *Makhzan's* contributors were from Punjab, and, by and large, Muslims. The journal's emphasis was perceptibly shifting from poetry to prose.

*Zamana*\* built up a reputation, particularly after Daya Narain Nigam took over its editorship. While *Makhzan's* contributors were largely Muslims from Punjab, *Zamana's* contributors included Hindus and Muslims in an equal number—and from all over India. Many an old Muslim writer contributed to it and praised it. This was an honour that had “gone to a Hindu after a very long time.” Among its contributors were some from the older generation who had almost given up writing nearly twenty years earlier. They were persuaded by *Zamana's* young editor to come back to the literary field. Among them were Khan Bahadur Syed Akbar Hussain (retired judge) and Shams-ul-Ulema Maulvi Zakaullah. “Many a famous writer and many an eminent editor of other papers also write for it.” Lala Lajpat Rai was a regular contributor. *Zamana's* policy was the policy of the educated Hindus. Its young editor, “who has just come out of college,” naturally subscribed to such views as were accepted by the educated youth of the Hindu community, e.g. advisability of widow remarriage and foreign travels, education of women, etc. It had a liberal outlook which could at times be taken as going against the Hindu traditions. “Every number of the journal had a few thought-provoking articles which were talked about.”

*Zamana's* speciality was plenty of literary criticism of current literature and comments on current topics. In fact, it is said that while *Makhzan* showed the way to Urdu journals to stand on their own feet, *Zamana* laid the foundation of literary criticism in Urdu language. The credit for the improvement in *Zamana* is shared equally by Nigam and Premchand.

In January 1905, we find Premchand sending a literary criticism of a novel entitled *Krishan Kunwar* by Hakim Barham for publication in *Zamana*. (The editor had felt and wrote to Premchand that a few pages of the criticism were missing. But Premchand wrote back that the piece was only of three sheets which might have been numbered by odd figures, one, three, five, seven, nine and eleven.”) The criticism was published in February 1905 issue.

\*The journal *Zamana* was started by Sheobrat Lal Varman in February 1903 from Qaisari Press, Bareilly. In November-December 1903, Varman entrusted the work to Daya Narain Nigam for three months—and never returned to it.



How and when Premchand met Nigam for the first time is not known. It is, however, clear that the contact was established within a year of Nigam's taking over of *Zamana*. And within a year or two, he came so close to Nigam, according to an announcement in *Zamana* of June 1906, the "permanent" editorial staff of the journal included, among others, "the esteemed and popular essayist Navabrai." Premchand, who then wrote under the pen-name of Navabrai, had been transferred to Kanpur a year earlier.

Premchand's stay at Kanpur was enlivened by the evening sessions at Nigam's house. The sessions with Durga Sahai "Saroor," Naubat Rai "Nazr," Peareylal "Shakir" and others were, in fact, a daily routine. Each one specialised in one subject or the other. Premchand's speciality appeared to be his knowledge of English literature. According to Sarju Narain Tewari, then a teacher at the Prithvi Narain High School, Kanpur, his reading of almost the whole of Walter Scott and Charles Dickens, and specially his ability to recount to the minutest detail the plots and characterisation, impressed them so deeply that he suggested that Premchand should devote himself to writing and thus improving Indian literature.

The writers, and a few teachers, would get together for hours on end and discuss all problems under the sun—and there were plenty of them to be discussed, especially the contents of *Zamana*. All of them, for instance, went through each issue of *Zamana* minutely and offered comments and suggestions to improve the journal. This interest was kept up even long afterwards. Once Premchand wrote: "... The (latest issue of) *Sarawati* has published three pictures of Narad. The article on Surdas is good. You too should devise ways to secure articles on Hindi literature for *Zamana*. . . . Perhaps Suraj Narain Mehr could write. . . ."

Again: "*Zamana* should be an up-to-date political force. I do not approve of devoting half the issue to Zauq. What do we get out of lamentations over Zauq? I know that there are many to mourn the loss of Zauq. But let this be done by *Adib*."

"My friendly advice is that you should allow *Adib* to take the place of *Modern Review*, and yourself take the place of *Hindustan Review*. You should lay emphasis on the quality of articles, its printing and get up, and politics, and very little on

pictures. If you do not do so, you will ruin yourself. There is no harm in admitting one's own defeat. And wherefrom would you bring the resources of the Indian Press? You ought to devote your attention to more important things. The volume of your journal should be uniform and not vary from 60 to 80 and 100 pages. Eighty or seventy-two pages of the larger format would do."

And he also lavished praise when it was due: "The July issue of *Zamana* has gladdened my heart. It is a good number. I do not think you should publish voluminous issues. . . . The coloured picture this time, was again bad. . . . *Zamana* ought to specialise in articles, not pictures. You should give pictures only when you get some remarkable piece; for it's no use giving pictures without discrimination. I, at any rate, am opposed to this. What you save on pictures should be spent on good lithography and printing. Do please give thought to getting articles on current topics. No article has appeared on Basu's Bill; what progress Gokhale's Bill has made; Mohammedan University's constitution, etc. These are good subjects for articles."

Nigam tells us that Premchand himself was writing *Zamana's* popular monthly column entitled "Raftar-i-Zamana" (the March of Time) on current developments in national and international fields—with or without the initials of "Navabrai."

India between 1900 and 1910 was in great ferment. Premchand wrote on many a current topic under Navabrai's name in *Avaz-i-khalq* (Banaras), *Zamana* (Kanpur), and *Adib* (Allahabad). These included biographical sketches of Oliver Cromwell, Raja Man Singh, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Swami Vivekananda, Garibaldi, Queen Victoria and Thomas Gainsborough; literary criticism, e.g. of "Sharar" and "Sarshar," *Krishan Kunwar*, Akbar's poetry; and such subjects as constitutional rule in Turkey, the *swadeshi* movement, how to popularise *swadeshi*, the industrial training centre at Baroda (Kala Bhavan), Urdu language and the novel, and primary education in U.P.

His essay on primary education in U.P. (May-June 1909), which was his own subject, throws interesting light on his way of thinking. Herein he compared the conditions of the lower and primary schools in U.P. with those in the United States where, according to an article by St. Nihal Singh in the *Modern Review*

of December 1908, a high school existed in every village with a population of two thousand and had a fine building, a library and a laboratory. Even a college in India, wrote Premchand, could not boast of these. A village school in U.P., according to him, consisted of a class of boys sitting on a worn-out jute rugget spread over unswept ground under a tree amidst dirt, the twenty to twenty-five children half-dozing. Opposite them sat a teacher on a broken chair, with a dilapidated table before him. The children were "learning everything by heart," and none would appear to have an untorn shirt. Their *dhotis* went down to their knees, their eyes downcast. "Yes, that is the condition of the school in Aryavarta which once boasted of Taxila and similar other universities. How far have we travelled!" We seemed to be so far behind in the race of civilisation, according to Premchand, that "we may not perhaps have even the heart to reach the goal."

"The principal requirement for any reform of our primary educational system," he wrote, "is that of competent teachers. Government has entrusted the job to teachers who do not get more than four or five rupees a month. How can one who is not free from material worries be inclined towards devoting attention to his work? Worse still is the condition of teachers in the aided schools where teachers get only three rupees and fifteen annas (after the deduction of the money order fee of one anna). The teachers' wages are half of those of the water-carrier in towns or even that of a manual labourer. The teacher, therefore, either turns towards cultivation or extorts higher fees on the sly, resulting in a reduction of the number of students. The teacher is also overworked and cannot give adequate attention to all the students. When the parents find that their wards are not getting proper education, they withdraw them from the school." Added Premchand: "Teachers trained in Normal schools too find themselves out of place; for they had been taught to teach one class only, whereas in the village school they teach four."

The writer suggested fifteen rupees as the minimum wage, the minimum degree for the teacher being a certificate in Urdu and Hindi upto the Middle standard.

This, he agreed, called for larger expenditure, but "national education is an item where nothing is wasted. Surely, the

Government can, on this truly useful work, spend Rs. 50 lakhs, as against the present 19 lakhs, if it wishes. When the expenditure on wars is mounting every day, and when money is wasted on amenities of highly paid officers, the argument of paucity of funds is untenable."

The author also suggested that the system of appointing village school teachers as postmasters needed a review.

"Rather than waste money on the two or three schools for training six teachers each in every district, through a teacher with a Normal school degree, it would be far better if we restrict the work to one school in each district with a teacher who has a certificate from the Allahabad Training College. Such a teacher, English-knowing and familiar with modern teaching methods, could train the teachers-to-be far more adequately."

Unfortunately, wrote Premchand, Government thought of spending more money on the inspection of schools, irrespective of the fact whether there was education or not. In fact, the expenses on inspection far exceeded those on education itself. "When will the Government realise that inspection can never be a substitute for education?"

The curriculum too called for a review. "The readers now being prescribed are useless. . . . Their language deserves to be touched up. . . . The primers should be done away with . . . geography is enough. . . . drawing is meaningless, and should be replaced by a little primer in regard to health. . . . The place of rules of languages should be taken by teaching of the principles of agriculture. . . . And of considerable importance is the subject of letter writing."

The author also draws a picture of the premises of upper primary schools which "remind one of a cattle shed or an orphanage," their walls crumbling, their floors *kuccha*, their roofs falling and their doors worn out. "At least half of the money meant to be spent on construction goes to the middlemen. School buildings in many of the villages are premises placed at the disposal of the teacher by the *zamindar* who wishes to earn salvation through such free use of his house. With this, however, goes the din of clients."

Here's the concluding paragraph: "Such being the condition of our educational system, it is a shame that our public workers

too are ignorant of the pressing problems. How many of the journalists or lawyers who are accustomed to passing resolutions, have toured a district to ascertain how many schools have buildings? The Director's reports do not say what percentage of teachers could pride themselves on their school buildings. And in the light of the ability and education of the members of District Boards, to expect of them to agitate on these problems is hoping for the impossible."

It is indeed a strange coincidence that in the same month as this article was published, Premchand was appointed a Sub-Deputy Inspector of Schools!

Premchand, at this time, also did other jobs, including canvassing for subscribers for *Zamana*. In one of his letters, he says: "Please send me copies of the June issue as soon as it is out, also five copies of the April issue. I shall then start canvassing, tour Ghazipur, Ballia, Gorakhpur and Banaras, and enlist at least fifteen to twenty subscribers in Banaras alone." He adds: "The list of subscribers, I have already sent to you, must have pleased you. Even though I wanted to send you a list of at least fifty, I contented myself with sending you sixteen names only." Later he canvassed for the *Zamana* publications too. "The list of publications that you have sent me does not indicate the name of the press. As regards *Swami Ramtirth*, if you could get it approved by the Textbook Committee, I can help you in the sale of about a hundred copies. I think now you ought to be going to Allahabad more often, and think of publishing books under the prize scheme. I am ready to cooperate with you in this. If the printing is good and a book is accepted, it should certainly yield some profits."

## Early Short Stories.

WHILE PREMCHAND WAS making his mark in the field of Urdu novel and also a weighty contribution in that of Urdu journalism, there was yet another field in which he became almost a pioneer—that of short story wherein he later attained national and international renown.

Generally speaking, what is true of the novel in Urdu and Hindi, is also true of the short story. Its modern form came from the West—and again through Bengali—at the turn of the century. The modern form had little in common with the short stories which are the pride of Sanskrit literature, e.g. the *Jataka* tales, *Panchatantra*, *Hitopadesha*, *Vrihat Kathasaritsagar*, or even the tales which form part of the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, the latter using the allegorical form to draw a moral or to illustrate points of metaphysics. In fact, this form of literature which attained new heights in olden times, was completely overshadowed, rather replaced, by poetry and drama during the medieval times.

In the nineteenth century, however, there arose a school of writers who drew on the inexhaustible treasure house of Sanskrit or Persian or Arabic literature to write such collections of short stories as *Baital Pachisi*, *Singhasan Batasi*, *Rani Ketaki ki Kahani*, *Nasitopakhyam*, or the contemporary *Gulbakavali*, *Tota Maina*, subsequently translated from Urdu into Hindi. Urdu translations of *Alf-Laila* or *Gulistan* and *Bostan* also followed a path divorced from realities. All these attempts naturally failed to make the same impact as the modern short story which embraced all conceivable themes ranging from the detective and the romantic to travelogues, unusual happenings, or even gossip among friends. Abridged Hindi versions of standard works of English literature, like those of Shakespeare, were also published in the form of short stories, but they did not contribute to the technique. The first effective use of the modern medium of short

story in India was in fact not in Hindi or Urdu but in Bengali language. Translations from that language found a ready market in Urdu as well as in Hindi. This is particularly true of the works of Gurudev Tagore who had established a reputation as a writer of short story in Bengali.

While some of the Bengali short stories were translated literally into Urdu and Hindi, attempts were also made by some writers to adapt them to local conditions to such an extent that the entire character of the story changed, and the translated versions had little in common with the original.

It was with Urdu translations of Bengali short stories, in particular those of Tagore, that Premchand came to be associated with this form of literature.

Mention may also be made of a longish story relating to an event in Rajput history, which he translated from Hindi into Urdu. The basis of this story entitled *Roothi Rani* (published in three instalments in *Zamana* in April, May and August 1907) was the struggle for power between the incoming Moghuls and the Rajput principalities warring against each other in the year 1586. The new Rawal, Moonkiran, who had ascended the gadi of Jaisalmer, was involved in a family feud with Maldev, the Raja of Marwar. The Rawal had a pretty daughter, Umade, whom the Raja of Marwar offered to marry. The Rawal felt slighted and planned to have the Raja murdered. The latter, however, escaped this fate through the advance warning conveyed to him by Umade who was keen to marry the Raja. During one of the escapades, the Raja, in a state of inebriation, fell for the maid-in-waiting. This pained Umade and she was annoyed. Her anger provided an opportunity to the other wives of the Raja of Marwar. They poisoned his ears against the new Rani's "pride." His sagacious prime minister, however, put the Raja wise and brought about a rapprochement. The jealousy of the Ranis as well as other court intrigues, however, made the new Rani and the Raja drift away from each other. The intrigues at the court were only a miniature of the intrigues and jealousies between the various Rajput principalities. Although the principalities later succumbed to the onslaught and diplomacy of Akbar, Marwar's armies managed to repulse the attack of Sher Shah who had wrested power from Humayun and had attacked the Marwar princes. But the Raja who

defeated Sher Shah, could not win over the heart of Umade. When, however, the Raja died, Umade, in accordance with the custom, immolated herself. What was needed, according to the author, was not only patriotism and bravery but also national unity and cohesion. It was also important to restore to a place of honour the Rajput woman who in ages gone by had given birth to mighty warriors.

The last instalment of the story is followed by the note: "Adapted and translated from the original in Hindi."

Premchand seemed to have attempted his first original short story in Urdu in 1907, entitled *Duniya ka sab se Anmol Ratan* (the most valuable jewel in the world).<sup>\*</sup> The language of this first story is Persian-ridden and the theme is slender.

Here is how it begins: "Disheartened and dejected, Dilfigar (the injured heart) sat under a thorny tree, shedding tears of pangs of love. He was a true devotee of the Goddess of Beauty, Queen Dildareb (bewitcher), and not one of the class which displayed perfumes and scents and gaudy dresses to win over the beloved or who acted as beloveds, parading as lovers. He was rather among the simple-hearted and artless lovers who undergo the tribulations of wandering through jungles and hills in search of the beloved. Queen Dildareb, he remembered, had asked him to bring to her court the most valuable thing in the world, if he wanted her to accept him as her lover."

Determined to win over Dildareb, Dilfigar sets out to secure the "most valuable thing in the world." He brings the tear drop shed by a murderer, about to be hanged, on seeing a young child. "Is this drop the most valuable thing in the world?" Dildareb says, "No." He then brings a part of the ashes of a beautiful woman sacrificing her life on the funeral pyre of her husband. The sweetheart rejects this too. Then Dilfigar goes out and meets a young man who claims to be "the son of my mother, and the beloved of India" about to die of wounds inflicted in a battle. On learning that the lover is from a country other than his own, the mortally wounded says to him: "If you be a foreigner, come and sit on this little patch of land, stained

<sup>\*</sup>Premchand says it was published in *Zamana* in 1907. Surprisingly enough, however, Daya Narain Nigam in the complete list of Premchand's publications and writings in *Zamana* does not refer to this story. Nor do the files of *Zamana* seem to confirm Premchand's statement.



with my blood. This is all that is mine. None but death can deprive me of this. I am sorry you have met me at a time when we are unable to play the host. The country of my forefathers has passed out of our hands. We are now stateless. We have, however, told the enemy and the aggressor that a Rajput sacrifices his life gladly for the motherland. The corpses lying about here are of those who have been killed in battle. And although I am stateless, I consider myself to be blessed to be dying in the enemy's camp." When the Persian lover applies balm to the wound, the young Rajput says: "Why have you put this balm? Let my blood flow. Don't stop it. Have I been born to live like a slave in my own country? I think it is better to die than to live the life of a slave. And there can be no better death than one in the defence of the motherland." The lover takes this drop of blood to Dildareb, who accepts his proposal because she agrees that "the drop of blood shed in defence of the motherland is the most valuable thing in this world."

This is how the story ends: "All of a sudden then, the embellished curtain was rung down. He saw a bevy of pretty girls, among them Dildareb whom even Zulekha would envy. Full of charm and grace, she sat on a gorgeous throne. Dildareb was stunned to see her beauty; she appeared to be like a painting on the wall. Rose Dildareb from her throne, advanced towards Dildareb and held him in her arms. The damsels surrounding Dildareb danced with joy and they sang. The courtiers offered presents to Dildareb and installed him as the royal consort—the Moon and Sun put on the throne, with all honours."

Here are the other stories published about the same time:

*Yehi Mera Vatan Hai* is the story of an Indian who returns from America at the age of 90. His last ambition is to die in the land of his birth. On his return, after 60 years' absence, he finds that India, as represented by his village school, *chaupal*, *dharamshala*, the very trees in the village, has changed beyond recognition. Also gone is the bravery and chivalry of old. "This is not the India of my younger days, the India of my dreams," he says. He still thinks that the worship of the Ganga is good and represents true India, and his last wish is that he should die in his cottage on the bank of the Ganga. "My children and grandchildren call me back to America, but I won't leave this

country and will ensure that my last remains are consigned to the Ganga."

*Sheikh-i-Makhmoor* is the story of Masoud, the scion of a royal family who is in hiding and espouses the cause of his subjects now being oppressed by a foreign ruler. He is a brave man, and dons the *fakir's* robes and is known as Sheikh-i-Makhmoor. His popular support enables him to fight the oppressor and liberate his people. He is welcomed by the people enthusiastically like "bulbuls freed from their cages."

*Sila-i-Ma'atam* is different from the other stories of the early phase which, in one way or another, touch upon India's inherent greatness and the enslavement of a people by a foreign power. This is a romance where the hero has no love lost for his illiterate wife Kumudini and chases Lila, a Christian girl. Lila, however, sends him a message that she is down with plague at Naini Tal and that he should forget about her. A subsequent message says she is dead. The hero is thoroughly grief-stricken and unhappy and regrets that Lila should have let him down. In the meantime, he meets a Sikh young "man," Mehar Singh, whose voice attracts him. The hero coaches Mehar Singh in English. Mehar Singh is attached to him and accompanies him to Simla, where the hero, proud of his looks, is stricken with small pox and becomes ugly. On his recovery, the young "man" leaves him and then returns with Lila! The young "man" is none other than Kumudini, his wife. Lila thus arranges a reunion and says that "you have now been rewarded for your grief."

*Ishq-e-Duniya Aur Hubbe Vatan* is again a chapter out of the life of Mazzini, the Italian patriot, showing the privations he underwent and the platonic love between him and Magdalene arising out of his sacrifices for Italy. (Premchand, some eight months earlier, had already written a biographical sketch of Garibaldi in the *Zamana*.)

In the longish 54-page story, *Sair-e-Dervish*, Premchand acquaints us with a globe-trotter from Berlin whose most indelible impression of the tour is that of fidelity and chastity of the Indian woman. During his tour in the Himalayas, he meets Priyamvada whose husband Sher Singh is turned into a lion under the curse of her friend Vidyadhari who is the wife of Shridhar. The curse arises out of Vidyadhari's mistaken impress-

ion that Sher Singh's contact with her body, while he helped her to get on a swing with his wife, had an evil motive. Priyamvada serves her lion-husband devotedly and undergoes suffering. Twice she saves Shridhar from the jaws of death, once from drowning in the Ganga and again from dacoits. By an unusual event, wherein she saves a prince from her lion-husband's clutches, she inherits half the kingdom and rules it for the amelioration of the lot of her subjects. She engages Shridhar as her Dewan and gets tanks, dharmashalas and irrigation works constructed in villages, appoints travelling *hakims* and launches a cleanliness campaign. Beautiful Vidyadhari becomes a pawn in the courtly game, is attracted by the ruling prince and is later remorseful. Her husband leaves and it is Priyamvada who brings about a reunion. Vidyadhari's curse is lifted and the lion again becomes a man.

The traveller is stunned at the powers of a chaste woman and tells his countrymen on his return: "It is indeed a pity that a western nation should be pointing fingers on a race that produces such chaste women. I'll exchange a thousand European women for one such Indian woman. If Germany is proud of her military might, France of her culture, and Britain of commerce, India is proud of her ideals of chastity. Isn't it a matter of shame for Europeans that not one of their top-most poets—neither Homer nor Virgil, neither Dante nor Goethe, neither Shakespeare nor Hugo—has been able to create a character like Sita's or Savitri's. The European society has no such ideals of chastity.

"We in Europe consider the relations between husband and wife as physical only; we completely ignore the spiritual side of it. That is why, despite centuries of civilisation, there is not a single instance of chastity and fidelity. And the way our life is moving we may not have them even in future. Chastity is a great spiritual force and if you wish to know the miracles it can work, visit India."

## Separation and Remarriage

THAT PREMCHAND'S (i.e. Navabrai's) novels, short stories and journalistic work had established his position in the realm of Urdu letters, is indicated by the fact that Chintamani Ghosh of the Indian Press, Allahabad, offered him the post of the editor of his proposed monthly journal *Firdaus*. Terms were negotiated and Premchand started preparations for the first issue of the journal. In a letter dated November 16, 1907, he writes to Durga Sahai "Saroor," a well-known poet of the time and a friend of the *Zamana* group of writers, staying in Pilibhit:

"You might have forgotten me, but here is my remembrance. . . . The Indian Press of Allahabad has thought of bringing out a first-rate Urdu journal from January 1908. I have undertaken the task of editing it. I have done this in the hope of having the fullest cooperation from friends like you. The first issue will be out on January 15, and will be illustrated. Full care will be taken to ensure that the calligraphy, paper, printing and illustrations are of high quality. The Indian Press, as you know, is rich. It can spend lavishly on the journal. I wish the poems in the first issue are specially effective. And, for such poems, whom else but you can I ask? Due honorarium, or whatever you indicate, would be sent to you humbly. Compared to other journals, you would find this one worthwhile. And I need hardly say that your poem would be the first to be published. The journal, I might add, would be a political one."

The letter is signed by "Dhanpatrai, Master, Government School, Kanpur," and below this is clearly legible "Navabrai," which is scored out deliberately. This was possibly to convey to the poet the real identity of Navabrai.

In any case Premchand was on the verge of resigning his post in the Government school, when his friends advised him to take a year's leave, watch the progress of the journal and assess his prospects in the journalistic world before resigning. Luckily

for him, he accepted this view, and his position remained unaffected when the proposal was finally dropped.

His job in Kanpur at Rs. 30 per month, supplemented by a tuition of Rs. 10 per month, brought him enough to meet his needs. He was also happy in the company of his friends with whom he would share his happiness—and full-throated laughter.

With all the acclaim which Navabrai won and with all the respect and esteem of his friends, there was something which was eating into his vitals like a canker—his married life had broken up. The chief reason, as can be easily guessed, was the tyranny of the stepmother over his “unfortunate” wife with whom he had “pulled on uncomplainingly just as all traditional husbands do.” The unhappiness that pervaded his life is reflected in some of the short stories. He also opens out his heart in letters to his closest friend (adopted “elder brother” even though he was junior in age) and trusted guide and mentor, Nigam, who was a wordly wise man and who had made his mark by establishing a successful journal, a press and a publishing house which had the support of several members of his family who were well placed in life, either in Government service or as lawyers. Some of these letters, written without any inhibitions whatsoever, tell us about his home life, about his poverty and about the break-up of his married life.

Here is a picture of his house in Lamhi, which, “although the envy of everybody in the village,” did not have a single room worth living.

“On the roof there is a rain of fire. If one sits down, one starts sweating from head to foot. The rooms on the ground floor are so dirty that I feel disgusted. In one room there is space only for the bullocks, in another for cowdung cakes, in yet another for the foodgrains, in still another, for the grinding wheel, pestle and mortar. . . . There is no space either to rest or to sleep. With great difficulty I have been able to make room for my bed in the store for the foodgrains . . . . In this heat, I can neither read nor write. All that I can do is to skip through a few pages in the mornings. For the rest of the day—and night—I lie in bed. A great one to sleep, I find that here even sleep is not at my beck and call. I am very unhappy and wish the vacation was over soon, so that I could derive pleasure from the friendly sessions. While at Kanpur I used to pass my days in

laughter, here I eat the dessert of silence, or the sweet of dumbness."

His domestic life was obviously unhappy. There were bickerings and ugly scenes between his stepmother and his wife. Once when the stepmother returned from her parents and saw that considerable money and pains had been lavished on the treatment of Premchand's wife, supposedly possessed by evil spirits—Premchand himself participated in the rituals by the witch doctor to drive the spirits away—she was furious. Premchand's sister, who had come, was driven away. The stepmother asserted her domination. The relations between the stepmother and the wife deteriorated. When Premchand came again after a year, he found that the two women were at each other's throats. The stepmother hurled invectives. "My wife felt offended, and when it was past midnight she hanged herself by the rope. The stepmother got scent, ran for her and unloosened her. When I learnt about it the following morning, I lost my temper. My wife was adamant that she would no longer live in the same house and that she must go back to her parents. I did not have money on me. As a last resort, therefore, I realised the dues from the land and made arrangements for her departure. She wept. I did not like even to take her to her parents. It is now eight days since she left. There has been no communication from her. It was with great difficulty that I passed a fortnight of unending domestic troubles. Now I hate the very sight of her. God willing, our separation this time would be final. It ought to be so. I shall live without a wife. If the cat takes mercy and leaves the hen, it surely can live, even without its feathers." She left him for good.\*

\*One cannot be certain about the date of Premchand's separation from his first wife. Premchand himself in a letter in 1935, says that his first wife "died" in 1904. As Premchand had shifted to the high school at Kanpur only in May 1905, it sounds more plausible that the year under reference might really be 1906 or 1907 by which time he had developed really close relation with Nigam. A good deal of the confusion has resulted from an undated letter written during summer vacation by Premchand to Daya Narain Nigam. Nigam wrote on it later the year "1905" with a question mark, and also quoted it in his obituary article on Premchand. The only clue in the letter is a request by Premchand that his name should be announced as having been taken on the editorial staff on a permanent footing. And this fact is announced in the June

Within three or four days of his first wife's departure, parents of Premchand's stepmother insisted that he should marry again. "When I tell them," he told Nigam, "that I am poor and penniless, with not enough even to live on, my stepmother says that I won't have to spend a single penny; all that is required of me is my consent. The proposed bride, I am told, is pretty, well brought up and within my reach—without any expense. Shouldn't I feel tickled? God is my witness; I have already dreamt of her for the last two or three nights. I may get out of this situation somehow, but the future is certainly in the hands of God. The proposal calls for serious consultation and counsel from you, which I shall follow."

Soon afterwards, he returned to Kanpur, his place of work, and stayed as Nigam's guest for a time and later rented a house close by, to be lived in by himself, his stepmother and Vijay Bahadur. His interests now were teaching and journalism through the columns of *Zamana*. While his mornings were devoted to writing, his evenings were given to sessions with *Zamana* set of friends. He would return from these sessions at about 10 o'clock at night.

Once, we are told, in the house of a neighbour of Nigam, a gramophone record of Bert Shepherd's laughing song entitled "I sat in a corner," was being played. For some time Premchand restrained himself, but then burst out. "I will join him in laughter," he said and gave peals after peals of laughter in harmony with the singer, other friends joining him, or rather were provoked into joining him. He was indeed a great one to laugh. We are told by his friends that if he laughed, cobwebs vibrated. If he laughed while passing through the market place, the attention of every shopkeeper would be drawn towards him. And he did not need any particular occasion to laugh.

The vacuum in his life gnawed at him. He hoped his wife would return to him. She having left him at her own insistence,

1906 issue of *Zamana*. The year of separation should, thus, be 1906, and not earlier. Ram Chandra Varma, a contemporary of Premchand, says that Premchand had told him that he got remarried "several years later" (*Kai sal bad*), which according to his impression meant "at least three to four years." This would mean the separation of Premchand in 1906 and his remarriage in 1909. This should correct the erroneous impression conveyed by many writers, including Premchand's son, Amritrai, that Premchand got separated in 1905 and remarried in 1906.

he would not think of taking the initiative to call her back. And she seemed to have insisted that he should go to fetch her. This "fluid" situation continued for "at least three or four years." During this time he seemed to have found refuge in the arms of a woman whom he kept and about whom nothing was known except from his own confession from the sick bed shortly before his death. But, "I have had no love affairs. Life was so engrossing and bread-winning was such a tough job that it left no scope for romances. There were some petty affairs of a very universal type, and I cannot call them love affairs."

Meanwhile, parents of unmarried girls approached him for matrimony. He had to face facts. His wife was obviously not returning and he had to remarry. "A pleasant and healthy man, earning his own living, he could have easily got one to two thousand rupees as dowry, which meant a large amount to him." But how could the author of *Hum Khurma-o-Hum Savab* marry a young girl? Shouldn't he set an example of widow remarriage? After a good deal of thought and discussion, he opted for a child widow.

Reading an advertisement in the matrimonial columns of a newspaper from one Munshi Deviprasad of Salempur village, in Fatehpur district, regarding his daughter who had been married at the age of eleven and widowed three months after the marriage, Premchand sent particulars about his education and his salary, etc. Saying that his first wife was dead, he offered to accept the child widow in wedlock. Deviprasad, an ardent Arya Samajist who had written a pamphlet advocating widow remarriage, sent Premchand a copy of the pamphlet and invited him to Fatehpur, liked him and gave him fare and the customary gift symbolising a commitment. Says Shivrani Devi, the second wife, "The marriage did not meet with the approval of Premchand's people. He, therefore, did not even inform them of his wishes. His marriage to me, against all conventions, was a bold step, and shows his courage."\* Those who accompanied Prem-

\*In the case of Premchand's second marriage also, there is confusion regarding the correct date. Shivrani Devi says that she became a widow in 1901 at eleven. Her younger brother's age then was three. Her mother died when she was fourteen (in 1904). When she was married again, her brother's age was five. The year of Premchand's second marriage, therefore, should be around 1906. If that be so, Mrs. Premchand's statements that *Soz-i-*



chand to Salempur included Mahatabrai, Nigam and a couple of friends.

The bride came to Kanpur and stayed with the husband's joint family, i.e. a stepmother, a stepbrother and the stepmother's brother. She stayed there for fourteen days, but could not forget her five-year old brother whom, since their mother's death two years earlier, she had brought up like a son. Naturally, she did not quite relish the life at her husband's and was keen to return to her father's, knowing full well that she would have to return soon. The husband's life, she found, was an extremely busy one, teaching at the school during the day, late evening sessions with journalist friends, getting up at four o'clock in the morning, having a little wash and then getting down to his journalistic or literary pursuits. "His pen moved as fast as the spade of a labourer."

*Vatan* appeared one year after her second marriage and that while she got married to Premchand in *Phalgun* and he was promoted to the post of a Sub-Deputy Inspector of Schools in *Chaitra*, is wrong. The belief in India that a woman brings good luck to the husband on marriage, however, would indicate that Mrs. Premchand could not be wrong in regard to this sequence of events. As Premchand became a Sub-Deputy Inspector in June or July 1909, it would appear that Premchand's second marriage to Shivrani Devi took place in 1909.

## Inspector of Schools

WITHIN A FEW months of Premchand's second marriage, he was offered the post of a Sub-Deputy Inspector of Schools. The letter containing the offer shows that it was made by J.W. Bacon, Inspector of Schools, Allahabad Division, through the headmaster of the District School at Kanpur. The Inspector "has the honour to inform you that the Chairman of the District Board, Hamirpur, has appointed Mr. Dhanpat Rai, ninth master, District School, Kanpur, as Sub-Deputy Inspector of Schools, Hamirpur, on probation. The Munshi should be asked to report himself to the Chairman, District Board, Hamirpur, at a very early date." The headmaster's forwarding note on there verse side is dated June 16, 1909.

The offer, which meant some monetary benefit, was attractive, and Premchand joined there on June 24, 1909, on Rs. 50. He thought he would keep his family at Kanpur where it could be looked after by Vijay Bahadur, and go on tour for about a fortnight every month (the prescribed number of touring days in a month was 24), particularly in areas around Kanpur. With this plan in mind he accepted the offer, and reported for duty at Mahoba. The history and topography of this region would help us in understanding Premchand's writings greatly.

One of the five tehsil headquarters in Hamirpur district, Mahoba, along with Kulpahad, constituted a sub-division in charge of a resident magistrate. The town had an ancient history going back to the times of the Gaharwars, Rajputs and subsequently of the Chandelas, who ruled in the ninth century (Remains of Chandelas, impressive edifices and embankments, still exist in Mahoba which, for some time, was their capital.)

After sporadic Muslim occupation, the district came into the hands of Chhatrasal, the Bundela national hero, in 1680, who fought many a famous battle with the Moghul imperial forces and bequeathed it to his ally, the Peshwa. An indication of the un-

certainty of times at different periods is the existence of the many forts, big and small, that lie scattered all over the district.

Mahoba sub-division is situated\* in the southern, and hilly, part of the Hamirpur district. The Gangetic alluvium plain of the district stretches from the banks of Jamuna river in the north to the outer scraps of the Vindhyan plateau in the south. The underlying rocks concealed by the plain are exposed as the Bundelkhand gneiss in the southern part of the district where the hilly region is broken by scattered outlying spurs and isolated hills. The district is intersected by several rivers or streams and their tributaries, e.g. the Betwa and Dhasan and Birma Nadi.

Although the average elevation is seldom over 1,000 feet above the sea level, and the terrain treeless, the rugged outlines and the numerous artificial lakes built by Chandelas, Muslims and Marathas—one of the lakes near Mahoba has a circumference of four miles—have made the country picturesque. Some of these lakes or huge reservoirs of water, have been used for irrigation purposes in a region which is dry and has little rainfall. The region, subject to cycles of varying agricultural prosperity, had seen several famines, e.g. as in 1895-97.

An American (Christian) missionary society, it might be mentioned, had started work at Mahoba in 1895. By 1901, the native Christian converts numbered 223 and the number was rising steadily.

The district, however, compared favourably with others in U.P. in regard to literacy. At the turn of the century, there were two schools in the district run by Government and 97 schools run by the district board. Many of the latter were inspected by Premchand who had to tour a lot, visiting Kanpur whenever possible.

Back at Kanpur, the treatment meted out by Premchand's stepmother to his second wife was not much different from her treatment to his first wife. The mother-in-law would carry tales from one to the other and create differences. Shivrani Devi, too, got fed up. "I was not given to unnecessary quarrels, and would, therefore, prefer to live at my father's."

Premchand, however, wanted her to assert her rights, to run the house and to create a place for herself. Premchand also wanted her to give up *purdah* and would say:

"You are not the wife of a newly-wed. Why should you observe purdah then? I have been seeing it for the last several years, and am fed up. Why should you observe it—just because of the stepmother?"

"But why should I create difficulties for myself?"

Once while she planned to go to her father's, Premchand's stepmother protested and threatened to leave. Premchand had to pacify the stepmother by persuading his wife to stay on with the mother-in-law for some more days.

Soon afterwards, Premchand shifted his family, i.e. his wife, his stepmother and her children and Vijay Bahadur to Mahoba in Hamirpur district. In fact, it was after some persuasion that the stepmother agreed to accompany him. The persuasion was her elder brother's who was working at Kanpur and with whom she wished to stay. "Navab has changed," he said, "and if you ever wish to stay with him, you must shift now to Mahoba." She did, but returned to Kanpur three months later along with her children. Premchand had to send her money regularly.

Premchand's rented house in Mahoba was in a *mohalla* inhabited largely by *Kayasthas*, with whom he and his wife mixed freely. It was, however, seldom that they visited others' houses. It was here in Mahoba that Shivrani Devi delivered her first child, a daughter, who died ten months later.

An interesting fact mentioned by his wife about his life at Mahoba was that he declined the customary free supply of milk and *ghee* to the officials stationed there. The local colleagues impressed upon him that if he declined the customary free supply, it would create a precedent and the people would refuse such supplies to others also. But Premchand refused to be persuaded. He, however, did yield when they suggested that he might allow these customary gifts of milk and *ghee* to be consumed by his chaprasis and servants. "And there was so much of milk supplied free that the chaprasis and servants made *khou* and ate it."

Similarly, when Premchand went out on tours, he agreed to the customary ceremonies of *tilak* and *pan-beeda* in his honour, but refused to accept the cash which was generally presented.

"This is the custom here," the local people would say.

"But it is against my principles," he would reply.

Life at Mahoba entailed considerable touring by Premchand, a single tour some times lasting from one and a half to two

months. He would leave the family behind, to be looked after by Vijay Bahadur who was deeply attached to Premchand. Fond of reading books, Vijay Bahadur was a regular member of the family. Once when Premchand got a new coat stitched and bought a new pair of shoes out of his meagre earnings, Vijay Bahadur monopolised these two. Premchand, without any protest, kept on using his old coat and his old shoes. With this degree of friendship, Premchand naturally depended upon him for looking after his family during his absence on tours.

But Vijay Bahadur suddenly took ill and died prematurely. Premchand was crestfallen. It broke his back. Without him it became almost impossible for Premchand to undertake his tours without worry on account of his wife. "The job of Sub-Deputy Inspector of Schools that I had taken up with great hopes and ambitions, has now become a great burden. I have lost heart. How can I leave my wife alone and go on tours?"

He now wanted his wife to accompany him on his tours. "You should come with me, stay in the tent while I spend about an hour or so in inspecting the school," he said. "The *maharaj* is there to cook the food. You won't have much difficulty on that account. And in the evenings we could go out for a walk in the mountains."

"Is there another Indian officer who takes his wife along on tours?" she asked. "It would attract unnecessary attention and criticism."

"I don't think it would invite criticism. You should drive out old ideas from your mind."

"I really think it'll be an occasion for jokes."

"Look at the British people. They stay comfortably."

"But this is not England, this is India."

"Should we suffer on that account? I think it is stupid that you should be alone here, and I be touring. You'll be more comfortable with me."

"I feel shy." Nevertheless, she got over it and accompanied him on tours.

Premchand bought a bullock cart for which Mrs. Premchand gave him the money out of her savings. This meant a conveyance allowance of Rs. 20 per month.

At times, Mrs. Premchand would want to go out for a walk in the forest close by. The two would go out in the bullock cart,

leave it at the edge of the forest and go into the interior and pass the day in the greenery, at times climbing the hillocks, and return in the evening.

Once he persuaded her to accompany him to go to the fair at Charkhari, some ten miles away. Mrs. Premchand and some ten others went in the bullock cart, and Premchand on horse-back. A tent was put up at the fair. The local Raja, when told that the School Inspector had come there, sent the rations, and the chaprasi cooked the food. All of them ate. Mrs. Premchand and her female companions then went to the women's section (and the menfolk into the other). She felt bored and, after two hours or so, returned to the tent along with her female companions. Premchand returned home past midnight.

Premchand was more of a friend and not the traditional terror. He would spend the evenings in gossiping and chit chat. He would seldom go out unless, of course, it was absolutely necessary.

On his tours Premchand would spend time on reading and writing. He would entrust the inspection work to the teachers; for, otherwise, he said, they gave the question papers in advance. "I save them the trouble; and they are happy, and get good reports that help them in promotion," he told his wife.

"Why does the Government engage you?"

"Are all these big officers supermen?"

"But you must do your duty."

"Of course, I do my duty. But where is the harm if my actions benefit some people? That's the way the world goes. An officer who is officious ceases to be human. May God grant that I never become officious."

Says Mrs. Premchand: "He was always tremendously popular with his subordinates. This was because he would never try to boss over them; in fact, he would give due respect to those who were older than him in age."

Premchand did not believe in boot-licking. Once when a Deputy Inspector of Schools wanted him to procure a number of beds for his party, Premchand not only did not oblige but had an argument. Apart from doing one's duty, he thought, the subordinate and boss had no other relationship.

Premchand's boss anyway was fond of him and saved him from dismissal and prison.

## Authority's Challenge

FIVE OF THE earliest stories by Navabrai, namely, *Duniya ka sab se Anmol Ratan*, *Sheikh-i-Makhmoor*, *Yehi Mera Vatan Hai*, *Sila-i-Maatam* and *Ishq-e-Duniya aur Hubbe Vatan*, were published in a collection entitled *Soz-i-Vatan* some time in early 1908. The first announcement was made in *Zamana* of July 1908, in the shape of an advertisement which quoted from an appreciative review in the *Hindustan* of Lahore. The 96-page book was priced at four and a half annas, a cheaper edition on Swadeshi paper being priced at three and a half annas.

In a significant preface to the book, Navabrai said: "The literature of a nation reflects the march of time. The ideas which move it and the emotions that are echoed in their hearts are reflected in prose and verse, like your own image in mirror. Literature in the earlier phase of our life, when the people were steeped in ignorance, consisted of nothing but a few love songs and a few degenerate stories. The latter phase began when a life-and-death struggle took place between the new and the old ideas, and attention came to be devoted to plans for bringing about a reform in the social system. The stories of this phase largely revolve round the theme of social reform. The partition (of Bengal) has awakened ideas of revolt in the hearts of the people. These ideas cannot fail to influence literature. The few short stories presented here mark the beginning of this influence. It is hoped that, as our ideas take shape, literature of this type will also become increasingly popular. Such books are needed by the country badly in order to impress the imprint of patriotism on the coming generations." This was the time when Premchand had bought a picture of Khudi Ram, a terrorist, and hung it in his house. It was an act which a Government servant in those days could not think of, even in his wildest of dreams.

A review by the editor in the November 1908, issue reads: "*Zamana's* popular essayist, 'Mr. Navabrai,' has presented very

interesting examples of short stories, under the title *Soz-i-Vatan*. It is a collection of five very short stories which are very powerful and moving and whose principal aim is patriotism. The first story is on the model of *Hatam Tai*. Herein a true lover goes out in search of something desired by his beloved who wants the most valuable thing in the world. After incessant failures he at last lays his hand on the desired thing. The second short story is different from the point of view of style, but the aim again is patriotism, and the story is also somewhat better than the first. The best short story, however, is the third. The fourth has nothing to do with patriotism, and, therefore, does not really fit in with the rest. From the point of view of interest, it reminds one of the style of great masters of short story. The fifth, and the last, short story narrates the life of the great Italian patriot, Joseph Mazzini, and shows how true and immortal was his love for his country.

“In writing all these stories, the able author has kept in view the interest of his readers, and has portrayed those social problems which look uninteresting, in such interesting garb that they are absolutely unique and worthy of emulation. Even though these stories are very short, they follow the maxim that brevity is the soul of wit. In other words, the few words used here in the book convey a lot. In fact, had a resort been made to verbosity, these stories could have been very long indeed. Except the third short story, each one of the others has a lot of beauty and love and the limitations that they suffer from is the result of subtlety and suggestiveness of a poet; for, even though these stories are in prose and have nothing to do with verse, it can be asserted that in their composition there is real poetry. The pleasure that one derives from reading verses is the same as that to be derived from this prose. Without the least doubt, we can say that *Soz-i-Vatan* deserves to be called the best book of its type. While reading it we are reminded of the best short stories in Urdu. The chastity of language, the raciness of style, the witty sentences and the compactness of the plot—in other words, all the constituents of great art—have been brought together in this little volume in such a wonderful way that one is forced to praise it spontaneously. In our view, this publication will keep our friend's name alive for a very, very long time. We had been waiting for such a publication in Urdu



for a long time. 'Mr. Navabrai' has penned a few novels, too, but we had to point out examples of immaturity and weaknesses therein. But the more we are proud of this book, the less it is. In the end, we are confident that this type of book is full of promise in the country, and that subtle writers will not hesitate showing their craftsmanship in this vein. The book is very moderately priced, i.e. at four and a half annas a copy which is almost free."

The book is repeatedly advertised in the subsequent issues, even with a view to gaining circulation by presenting it free to prospective subscribers of the *Zamana* until February 1909, when the *Zamana* journal gives extracts from the reviews of the book in the *Arya Gazette*, *Swarajya*, *Hindustan*, *Minerva* and *Zamana* itself.

An interesting fact in this connection is that while the Hindi journals did not normally take notice of Urdu books, the *Saraswati* of Allahabad, which does not seem to have taken notice of Premchand's *Prema* and *Kishna*, mentioned this book of short stories in its column of book reviews for December 1908. "The book *Soz-i-Vatan*," it said, "is in Urdu, and has five stories relating to patriotism. The stories are recreational and full of message. A reading of these stories makes a deep imprint of love for the country. Such stories are badly needed these days. Those who read them can benefit immensely. The paper and printing is excellent. Its author is the famous Urdu writer Shri Navabrai. Priced at four and a half annas, the book can be had from Babu Vijaya Narain Lal, Naya Chowk, Kanpur."

From the address given in the book review it would be seen that Premchand had published the book at his own cost, and had possibly made arrangements for its sale directly through his stepmother's brother (Vijay Bahadur).

From the month of March 1909, however, the advertisement of the book is stopped completely, and there is no mention of the book. And thereby hangs a tale.

*Soz-i-Vatan* was possibly the first book published by *Zamana* Press. Owing to inexperience and unfamiliarity with the Press laws of the time, the imprint line of the publisher and printer was omitted through inadvertence and oversight. The offence was a serious one. The Criminal Investigation Department of the State set about the task of probing into the matter. The

name of the printer and publisher, the Zamana Press, was traced and Nigam was asked to pay a fine of Rs. 50.

During the investigations it was also revealed that the person writing under the name Navabrai, was none other than a Government servant named Dhanpatrai. The C. I. D. agents visited Mahoba and got confirmation.

That a Government servant should be writing such stories was enough to set the steel frame of bureaucracy on the move to strike. Six months after the publication of the book, on a wintry night, Premchand received urgent summons from the District Collector of Hamirpur, then camping at Kulpahad, asking him to see the Collector immediately. Premchand, then on tour, got the bullock cart ready and started immediately. He travelled thirty to forty miles through the night and reached the Collector's camp the following day. When he met the Collector, the latter had a copy of *Soz-i-Vatan* before him.

Having earlier got the scent that the Criminal Investigation Department of Police was in search of this book's author, Premchand was nervous. His apprehension that they had succeeded in tracing the author were justified. He understood that he had now been called to be put on the mat.

"Did you write this book?" asked the Collector. Premchand pleaded guilty.

The Collector asked Premchand to give him a gist of each story. Told of the contents, he was furious. "Your stories are biased; you are spreading sedition and have insulted the British Government," said the Collector. "You should thank your stars that you are a British subject. Had it been the time of the Moghuls, both your hands would have been cut off."

Premchand was ordered to hand over all the copies of the book to the Government and also never to think of writing anything without the Government's prior permission.

Of the 800 unsold copies out of the 1,000 printed, as many as 700, received from the Zamama Press, were presented to the Collector who got them burnt.\* (Premchand thought he had got off cheaply by sending the bundle of books, for it was possible that he might have been exiled to the Mandalay prison.\*\*)

\*The stock of a few hundred copies with Nigam was not thought of. These were sold later.

\*\*Where Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai were exiled for seditious activities.

After his encounter with the Collector, Premchand thought the trouble was over for the time being, but that it wasn't the end yet. He was convinced that it would raise its head again. His conjecture was not wrong.

Behind the scene, authority was not appeased all that easily. For, he later learnt that the Collector conferred with other officials of the district over this issue. The Superintendent of Police, two Deputy Collectors and the Deputy Inspector of Schools—under whom Premchand served—got together to decide his fate. One of the Deputy Collectors quoted extracts from the stories to prove that there was nothing in them but sedition from beginning to end—not only mild sedition but “sedition in its worst form.” The “police god” said that such a dangerous man must be punished severely.

The Deputy Inspector was, however, fond of Premchand, and to prevent the matter taking an awkward turn, he proposed that he would ascertain in a friendly way the author's political views and submit a report. (He had thought that he would advise Premchand caution and submit a report that the author of the book was interested only in writing, but was not connected with any political movement.)\*

“Do you think that he would tell you of his innermost thoughts?” asked the Collector of the Deputy Inspector.

“Yes, he would. I know him fairly well.”

“You mean you want to become his friend to find out his secrets,” said the Collector. “This is spying, and I consider it mean.”

\*In fact, however, Premchand sympathised with the National Congress. His interest in the movement is clear from the fact that he, along with Nigam, attended the Allahabad session of the All-India National Congress in 1910. (Nigam mentions that they had attended the Ahmedabad session which is obviously a mistake because Ahmedabad session was held in 1902, when Nigam does not appear to have known Premchand.) By the time of the Allahabad session, the two were very close. Additional proof of this is provided by the fact that Nigam says that while Premchand sided with Tilak, he himself supported Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta. Premchand, he adds, was opposed to gradual reforms and did not, therefore, approve of the Minto-Morley reforms. The reforms scheme had been introduced by 1910 and Gokhale and Tilak were also alive. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that a Government servant could then take part in political movements.

"It is only to obey your order . . .," stuttered the Deputy Inspector.

"These are not my orders," interrupted the Collector. "I don't want to give such an order. If the charge of sedition in this book is proved, he should be tried in an open court. Otherwise, he should be let off with a warning. I do not like hypocrisy."

The "police god" thought of other stratagems, too. In the end, however, the Deputy Inspector's proposal was accepted.

When, subsequently, the Deputy Inspector told Premchand of this happening, Premchand asked him: "Would you have really spied on me?"

The Deputy Inspector laughed. "Impossible." he said. "I would not do it, even if I were offered a lakh of rupees. I only wanted to stop the case from going to a court of law because if the case had gone to a court, a sentence was certain: for, nobody, I am certain, would have pleaded your case. . . . And in my objective I succeeded. The Collector, you would agree with me, is kind."

"Very kind indeed!" said Premchand, sarcastically.

A day after his meeting with the Collector, i.e. on his return from tour, Premchand told his wife what he had gone through.

"Do I take it that you won't write any longer?" she asked.

"Why shouldn't I continue to write?" replied Premchand. "I shall assume another *nom-de-plume*."

RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED ON Navabrai, stopping him from writing and publishing without prior permission, were irksome. Nevertheless, as a Government servant, he had to abide by the rules. He submitted a few pieces for prior permission. It, however, took several months before these were returned to him.

He was also reminded that although the undertaking did not mention newspaper articles, it meant writing of all types. Thus, says Premchand, “whatever be the subject on which I write—be it even on the tooth of an elephant—I will have to submit it to the Collector Saheb Bahadur. And writing for me is not an event that happens twice a year; it in fact is my daily routine. If an article reaches the Collector every month, he might think that I am neglecting my duties. Additional work would then be thrust upon me. For this reason, therefore, ‘Navabrai’ should die, and someone else take his place.”

That this was a serious matter and could not be decided off-hand is indicated by the fact that his next short story entitled *Gunah ka Agn Kund*, published in *Zamana* of March 1910, is credited not to “Navabrai” but to “Afsana Kuhan.” The subsequent story, presumably written earlier than *Gunah ka Agn Kund* and held over, was *Sair-e-Dervish*, published in four instalments in *Zamana* of April, May, June and July 1910. The first instalment announced the reservation of copyright, and although the name Navabrai was mentioned, it appears to have been done inadvertently, because while the reservation of copyright was announced in all of them, the name was dropped from the subsequent instalments. The last instalment, i.e. in July 1910, also mentioned the forthcoming publication of “another unparalleled” story, *Rani Sarandha*, in the following issue. And when the story appeared during the August and September issues, the author’s name was not mentioned; it being, of course, ensured that the copyright was reserved.

The pen-name "Premchand," which later got countrywide fame, appears for the first time on his story *Bade Ghar ki Beti*, published in *Zamana* of December 1910. The same issue also promised another "gripping and meaningful story" in the next issue. The story under reference was *Vikramaditya ka Taigha*, published in *Zamana* of January 1911.

The decision taken on the new pen-name, appears to have been a painful one, for this meant "five or six years of efforts spent on building up 'Navabrai' gone waste." Navabrai was "unlucky and would perhaps remain so for ever."

The new pen-name "Premchand" was suggested by Daya Narain Nigam and met with the author's approval. The two agreed that the "secret" of author's identity be reposed only in the closest circle. Premchand, therefore, was keen that anything written under this pen-name be published in *Zamana* only. For the stories and articles to be placed with other journals he wished to assume another name. He did not, for instance, agree to using this pen-name for articles in the *Educational Gazette* of Allahabad, because, for one thing, he did not know "what this gentleman may start writing once he grows in stature." According to his thinking then, this name was to be reserved for "tales of romance and chivalry."

Premchand's principal interests at this time were the history of Hamirpur, the progress of Arya Samaj movement to frustrate the efforts of the Christian missionaries to convert people in the district to Christianity, as also the injustices perpetrated by the Hindu society, which forced the people to take refuge in the arms of missionaries. *Gunah ka Agn Kund* is a historical short story, its theme drawn from Rajput history. Kunwar Prithvisingh Maharaj has given his sister away to the commander of the forces, Kunwar Dharmasingh. They are very close friends too and attached to each other. So are their wives. When the two Kunwars are away to Afghanistan on an expedition, the two princesses who are Sanskrit scholars, are met by a Brahmin woman scholar, Vrajavilasini. The latter tells them about her vow under which she had promised her dying father that she would take the revenge by thrusting steel into the Rajput who had killed their cow. Vrajavilasini's father had told her that he had no son, and that it was for her to take the revenge with the sword he gave her. Vrajavilasini endears herself to the two

princesses. On their return from expedition, Prithvisingh's wife makes the husband promise to honour the pledge of the Brahmin woman and to kill the Rajput. It só transpires that the Rajput concerned who had killed the cow, is none other than Dharmasingh. When Prithvisingh tells his brother-in-law about his vow, Dharmasingh reveals that he is the person concerned. The two decide that a Rajput must honour his own word. Prithvisingh, therefore, is forced to murder his brother-in-law. While his own sister commits sati on her husband's funeral pyre, she curses the brother. "You too shall die in the prime of youth." And this comes about; for Prithvisingh is murdered in Delhi within seven weeks, and his wife too commits sati. "The fire of sin is all-consuming. One sin consumed four lives, two of the princes and the other two of their wives."

The folklore of the regions around Hamirpur also provided rich material on the traditions of the Rajput warriors who fought the foreign invaders to maintain the independence of India in difficult circumstances, and of Rajput women who made great sacrifices for the preservation of values such as honour, bravery, fidelity, faith, love, the will to triumph over difficulties, admiration for the husband, self-respect and the religious conventions.

*Rani Sarandha*, for instance, is based on the folklore of Bundelkhand, wherein Aniruddha Singh, a Rajput, runs away from the battlefield, surrendering his arms and sacrificing all his comrades. His wife, Sheetala, is happy at his having escaped death, but his sister, Sarandha, tells him tauntingly that he has disgraced the family traditions. Sheetala thereupon throws a challenge to Sarandha and says that she would see how Sarandha behaves after she gets married. In due course, Sarandha is married to Raja Champatrai of Orccha, who seeks shelter at the court of the Moghul emperor. Sarandha is unhappy because while at Orccha she commanded the respect due to a Rani, now she is the wife of a Jagirdar, a mere servant of the emperor. Taunted by her, Champatrai is determined to regain his old position and is involved in the war of succession, wherein a Moghul army chief, Vali Bahadur Khan, is supposedly killed. The latter's beautiful Iraqi horse is taken away by Sarandha as war booty. Champatrai is subsequently pardoned by Aurangzeb and reinstated. Then one day Vali Bahadur Khan appears on

the scene, sees Champatrai's son riding his horse and grabs it. This leads to an altercation in the court between Vali Bahadur Khan and Sarandha. The two claim the ownership of the horse and are prepared to give away everything for its restoration, now a point of honour. Sarandha claims the ownership of the horse as war booty, and Vali Bahadur Khan as its real owner. Challenges are thrown. Rani Sarandha sacrifices her jagir and her dominions. She and Champatrai, who return to Orccha, are deserted by many of the comrades. Champatrai is attacked by the Moghul armies. The Rani wants to vacate the fort, but her sick husband, Champatrai, insists on his duty to save his servants and subjects. Truce is sought. The enemy agrees to allow all to leave the fort, but the price paid for this is the life of Raja Champatrai's son. The Raja and the Rani are later surrounded by a platoon of the enemy, and the Raja asks his wife, Rani Sarandha, for a promise.

"Yes," she said, "gladly" (thinking that he would ask her to sacrifice her life, rather than be caught by the enemy).

"This is my last wish; would you do it?"

"I shall do it."

"You have pledged. Don't go back on your word."

"You ask for anything, and I shall do it."

"Thrust your sword into my chest."

She was stunned. The enemy was advancing. Champatrai looked into her eyes. She leapt and thrust the steel into his heart. Oozed a stream of blood, but there was peace on Champatrai's face. The enemy force's leader advanced, professed loyalty to Sarandha. "If any of the sons of our family is alive," said Sarandha, "give him our two bodies," and she thrust the steel into her own breast. Unconscious, her head lay on the chest of Champatrai.

In the same category as Sarandha is the legend Hardaul, based on another folk tale of Bundelkhand. Hardaul is the younger brother of Raja Jujharsingh whose wife has maternal affection for the husband's younger brother. According to the legend, evil tongues poison the ears of Jujharsingh and the Raja comes to entertain some doubts regarding her fidelity to him. He decides to make her undergo a very severe ordeal. She must call Hardaul, he says, and give him poisoned food. Jujharsingh's wife tries to convince the husband of her innocence, but Jujharsingh would



have nothing of it. In the end she gives Hardaul poison. Hardaul apprehends it, but he gladly dies a martyr's death. That is the legend.

Raja Jujharsingh of Orccha, in Premchand's story entitled *Raja Hardaul*, helps the Moghul emperor of Delhi against the rebel Khan Jehan Lodi. In return for his services, the Moghul court appoints him the viceroy of his southern dominions. Before, however, he proceeds southwards, leaving his wife, Kulina, behind, he instals on the gaddi his younger brother, Hardaul, for whom he has immense love. While Hardaul rules over the Orccha State, comes a notorious character from Delhi, Qadir Khan, who challenges the might of every one in Orccha. Two Bundelas, Kaldev and Maldev, are chosen for a trial of strength. On two successive days, Kaldev and Maldev are defeated by Qadir Khan. Upon this, Hardaul decides to enter the fray and, lest his sword should break, he borrows Jujharsingh's from Kulina, even though she has strict instructions not to give it to anyone but Jujharsingh. Qadir Khan is defeated. Then one day Hardaul, who goes out for hunting, sees Jujharsingh and salutes him. Expecting that Hardaul would show him greater respect by walking barefoot and touching his feet, he suspects Hardaul and nurses hatred. The two brothers return to the palace. Kulina herself serves them food, but, forgetting that the situation has changed, she feeds Hardaul in a golden plate and Jujhar in a silver plate. Jujharsingh is furious. At night Kulina apologises for her mistake, but Jujharsingh lays down his price, i.e. Hardaul's life.

“Wouldn't it do, if I sacrificed my own?” asks Kulina.

“No.”

“Is there no other way out?”

“No.”

An evesdropper reports all this to Hardaul who is ready to sacrifice his life. When he is given a *pan-beeda* with poison in it, he takes it gladly and starts sinking. Jujharsingh stands there motionless but with tears in his eyes. On his face there is a smile charged with jealousy.

*Vikramaditya ka Taigha* is a story of the times of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. The locale is Mahanagar near Peshawar, where Sikh armies camp on their return from Kabul. The story is built round the character of Brinda, a widow with a son. Adopted as

a daughter by Prem Singh, an ex-soldier who is all alone in the world, she is humming a tune while she is doing the domestic chores. The Maharaja's soldiers who hear her singing, enter the house, take her away to their camp, and make her sing for them. Her adopted father protests to the soldiers and tells her not to return to his home. She wants to take revenge and goes to Lahore, where she establishes a reputation as a singer. She finds her way to the Maharaja's court, and when Ranjit Singh is pleased, she tells him her tale of woe.

"I am a widow," she tells him, "and it is for you to protect my honour. Since the death of my husband three and a half years ago, I lived a life of chastity, but these men of yours have ruined me. They have done things because of which I dare not go back home, or to lift my child in my lap or to raise my head before my old father. I evade the gaze of the women of my village. I have been robbed of the woman's only possession, her honour. Wasn't it after a woman that the entire country of Lanka was razed to the ground? And wasn't it for the honour of a woman that the entire race of the *Kauravas* met its doom? In this country, rivers of blood have flown for the protection of the honour of women and kingdoms have been destroyed. I have been robbed of my honour by your men. Who then is responsible for their actions? Whose blood should pay for it, is for you to decide."

Maharaja Ranjit Singh, stunned to hear this forceful speech by Brinda—who is carrying the sword of Vikramaditya, unearthed by her father, a sword that stood for justice—offers himself for sacrifice. He is responsible, he says, for the acts of his soldiers.

In this story, according to Premchand himself, he attempted "successfully" to adopt the technique of Rabindranath Tagore for a plot that was "absolutely original."

With this story, he tells Nigam, "there would be enough material to bring out another collection of short stories entitled *Barg-i-Sabz*."\*

\*No collection of this name was actually published, either because Nigam, who had burnt his fingers in connection with *Soz-i-Vatan*, declined or because no other publisher could be entrusted with the work of an author who wanted to keep his anonymity. It is, however, interesting to note that Premchand was determined to go ahead with his work, despite official curbs imposed on him.

## A New Stature

BADE GHAR KI BETI,\* which is the first story to have appeared under the new name "Premchand," marks a sharp departure from his earlier short stories. Even though he wrote a few more stories of romance and adventure afterwards, their plots seem to have been conceived earlier. Stories of the phase starting with *Bade Ghar ki Beti* have a different character. The themes are different, so is the maturity of treatment, as also the language which he uses in this story and the subsequent ones. The language is simpler and more direct. "Premchand" can be said to have come into his own.

Anandi, the heroine, who is well brought up, is married to Shrikant, B.A., the elder son of Beni Madhav Singh, a *zamindar* of village Gori. Shrikant's younger brother, Lalbihari Singh, is not well educated but is well built. Shrikant is employed in the city close by and visits his home only once in a week, i.e. on Saturdays. Once, on a Thursday, Lalbihari Singh kills two birds, comes home at lunch time and requests Anandi to cook them. There is not enough *ghee* in the house, and whatever there is, is put in cooking the birds. There is no *ghee* left for the *dal*. When Lalbihari Singh sees that the *dal* has been served without *ghee*, he comments upon the stinginess of his brother's wife. His comments ultimately lead to an argument about the status of Anandi's parents. This hurts Anandi and she praises her parents' liberality. The argument is taken a step further. Thereupon Lalbihari Singh gets annoyed, leaves the food and talks of pulling her tongue out. He even throws a shoe at her, and it just so happens that she is able to ward it off. Anandi feels

\*Published in *Zamana* of December 1910. According to Sudarshan, another eminent short story writer of that era, the first story to be published under the pen-name of Premchand in *Zamana* in 1909 or 1910 was *Mamata*. This is incorrect, for *Mamata* was first published in *Zamana* of February 1912.

distressed and does not eat anything for two days, that is till Shrikant returns home on the following Saturday.

Lalbihari Singh lodges the first complaint. Shrikant asks his wife about the incident. Told the full facts, he is furious and feels that Lalbihari Singh has exceeded the limits. He tells his father that the matter has to be decided one way or the other, that he and Lalbihari Singh cannot stay together any longer, that the father has to choose between the two of them. The father tries to pacify Shrikant. But Shrikant refuses to be pacified. Lalbihari Singh, however, hears all this. Full of remorse, he comes to Anandi, seeks pardon, and tells her that as he respects his brother who now does not wish to live together with him nor to see his face, he has decided to leave the house. Shrikant sees him, but turns his eyes away. Lalbihari's attitude melts Anandi's heart, and she asks her husband to pardon Lalbihari Singh, that she is sorry that she at all told him the full details, for she should have known better. Shrikant refuses to listen to her pleas. Lalbihari Singh is on the point of leaving when Anandi calls him back and tells him she has nothing against him. Shrikant's heart also melts. He comes out and embraces Lalbihari Singh. The father sees all this and is moved. "Only girls of good families can do this and put things right."

In *Ah-e-Bekas*,\* a thoroughly unscrupulous vakil who cheats a widow of more than half the pension awarded to her posthumously for the services of her husband who died in action in Burma, is a victim of hallucinations conjured up by the widow's wails that "I shall drink your blood." The family's obsession with fear leads to the death of his wife and completely ruins the family, his only son finding a place in a reformatory school in Chunar.\*\*

*Mamata* is a story of the change of heart brought about by a mother's love for her son, Ramarakshadas, whose wife's pressure forces the son to send the mother away from Delhi to Ayodhya. The son, according to the story, is opposed to con-

\*A reference in this short story bears out that *Rani Sarandha* and *Raja Hardaul* were in fact based on actual legends current in Bundelkhand.

\*\*Chunar, where Premchand had served in the Mission school, had the only reformatory for juvenile offenders in U.P.

version to Christianity but the steps taken to counter the movement are a mere eye-wash. He is extravagant and takes loans totalling Rs.20,000 from Girdharilal who is related to him distantly. When Ramarakshadas is unable to pay back the debt, his entire property is attached and he is left a pauper, with a sum of ten thousand rupees yet to pay. The two fall out, and Ramarakshadas supports Girdharilal's rival in the municipal elections. Girdharilal loses, and Ramarakshadas is happy. His happiness, however, is soon turned into gloom when, almost on the spot, he is arrested for his default to pay the rest of the money. The mother, when she hears this, goes to Girdharilal and pleads with the latter in the name of her love for the son. Girdharilal, moved by the mother's love, not only agrees to get Ramarakshadas out of prison but also takes him into one of his businesses as a partner. The mother is grateful to Girdharilal who now finds Ramarakshadas useful in his business, but does not wish to see the face of her daughter-in-law who is at the root of her son's extravagance.

Other stories written about this time and published in the *Zamana* included *Raj Hat*, *Alim-e-Be Amal* and *Alha*.

*Raj Hat* attempts to portray the maladministration of the princely state of Achalgarh in central India. The heir-apparent, an enlightened youth, is opposed to the extravagant waste of money collected from the poor and starving subjects, on dancing girls on the occasion of *Dussehra*. He leaves his father and meets the Political Agent who after listening to the youth's version, declines his father's invitation to participate in the observance of the festival. The youth who is later joined by his mother, thus wins against the challenge of his father.

*Alim-e-Be Amal* is the story of a self-made elderly lawyer who is the victim of a clever hoax played by his pretty wife whom he dissuades from playing a role in the theatrical performance. The wife, under another name, invites him—to her an object of esteem—to see her after the performance. This the lawyer does—to see that it was none other than his wife.

*Alha* is in line with the earliest historical and legendary stories, e.g. *Raja Hardaul* and *Rani Sarandha*. It attempts to recapture the atmosphere of Chandela bravery. The story is enacted in Mahoba itself, which was the capital of Chandela ruler Parmal Dev, the last scion of the family. He and his Rani, Malinha, had

brought up two warriors, Alha and Udal, who had attained great fame for their unparalleled prowess. Their proximity to the ruler led to court intrigues, and these intrigues, particularly by their maternal uncle, resulted in Alha, Udal and their mother quitting Mahoba in disgust and going over to Raja Jai Chand of Kannauj where the brave soldiers were welcomed with open arms. Later on, when Prithviraj Chauhan attacked Mahoba and the latter's vulnerability was revealed, Rani Malinha advised the people of Mahoba to persuade Alha and Udal to return to Mahoba. A courier, Jagna Bhatt, was dispatched. Alha and Udal who had left Mahoba in sheer disgust, nearly turned down the request. When their mother came to know of their intentions, she put them to shame for forgetting the favours they had received from the land of Mahoba. "Get out of my sight," she said, "and don't show me your face." Alha and Udal returned to find the Chandela armies, a hundred thousand strong, facing the overwhelming forces of Prithviraj Chauhan. The Chandelas were happy, and encouraged under the leadership of Alha, they gave such a fight to the enemy that, out of three hundred thousand soldiers on both sides, only three persons escaped—Prithviraj, Alha and Jagna Bhatt. The Chandelas and the Chauhans finished each other at this place of Orai, and cleared the ground for the defeat of the Chauhans by Shahabuddin at Thanesar. But Alha was never seen afterwards; whether he drowned himself or became a *sadhu*, none knows. "The people still believe that he is alive." He is remembered and has been immortalised.

*Manzil-i-Maqsood* which has no plot, describes in an ornate and sentimental language the quest by a wife for the realisation of the "ultimate destination."

While *Zamana* could publish only one story a month, Premchand's output was more. He now sent his stories to *Adib*,\* Allahabad, also. But these—including *Badi Behan*, possibly *Khauf-i-Rusvai*,\*\* *Sig-e-Laili* and may be even *Namak ka Darogha* and *Be Gharaz Mohsin*—were published under the authorship of "Navabrai," or "D. R."

\*Started by Indian Press, Allahabad, in January 1910. This should not be confused with *Adib* of Agra referred to earlier.

\*\**Khauf-i-Rusvai*, like the previous two stories, was published in *Adib*. It has not been possible to trace the story in the published volumes of stories, or lay one's hand on the issue of July-August 1911.

*Badi Behan* is the touching story of the love of an elderly sister for her very young brother. The sister, Kundan, is the only issue of her wealthy and landed parents till this young brother is born (at a time when there has been little hope). Kundan's husband, Jai Gopal, who is of poor parentage, lives on the bounty of his father-in-law and aspires to inherit all. When Kundan gets a brother, her husband is deeply distressed, beats up his wife and becomes inimical to the existence of a brother-in-law, Nunichand. The young boy is unlucky. His mother dies of plague and the father follows. The father hands over the child to the custody of the daughter and appoints the son-in-law as the guardian. The guardian is hostile to the young ward.

When Nunichand falls sick, he avoids getting the doctor. Meanwhile, the sister becomes indifferent to her own children and becomes more attached to the brother whose life seems to be in danger. At the dead of night she rushes him to a doctor. The husband is furious, threatens her and discards her. Kundan now seeks an interview with the British collector, and tells him of the plot to deprive her brother of his rights in property. And she does this while the husband is there with the collector. As a result, the property is converted into a court of wards. The boy is taken care of by the collector, and Kundan dies an unnatural death.

Another story *Sig-i-Laili* is a translation or an adaptation from some English story. We give below the plot of the story if only to give an idea of the sort of fiction that captured Premchand's fancy. The story is woven round the part played by a dog in the romance between Leila and her suitor, the shy John Barton, who has a rival in a widely travelled extrovert Lord Herbert. Barton has a pet dog, Robin, of whom Lord Herbert is mortally afraid. When Barton has to go to attend on his ailing father, he leaves Robin with Leila. Herbert sees in Barton's absence his chance. Robin is in the way. Lord Herbert, therefore, plans to get Robin poisoned by Barton's cook. The cook extorts £100 from Lord Herbert to replace Robin by a white dog painted black. The real Robin, however, appears on the scene, and Herbert has to flee for his life. Barton returns to find a remarkable attachment between Leila and Robin. Leila is unwilling to part with Robin, and, it is

hinted, with Barton. It is Robin, therefore, who helps to bring about a union between Leila and Barton!

*Namak ka Darogha* is woven round the theme of an honest salt inspector, Munshi Bansidhar, pitched against Pandit Alopudin, a rich businessman who believes sincerely that there is nothing that money cannot buy over. Alopudin commands great social esteem. When, therefore, Munshi Bansidhar instructs his men to take into custody the cart smuggling salt, Alopudin takes the threat lightly and himself goes to the scene to negotiate a settlement. The amount of bribe he offers goes up from one thousand to forty thousand. But Munshi Bansidhar refuses to budge an inch from his path of duty and honesty. Alopudin is arrested and tried. Through his influence, however, he escapes punishment and the person to be warned is not him but Munshi Bansidhar. Within a week, the latter is dismissed from service. He goes back home, to be reprimanded by his father for his unrealistic attitude towards the problems of life. Within another week, however, the Munshi is visited by Alopudin who praises the honesty of Bansidhar and his determination not to swerve from the path of devotion to duty and integrity, and offers him a contract to serve him as his agent with the fullest powers and a salary that appeared to be fantastically high. This he does because he knows the value of honesty to the employer.

*Be Gharaz Mohsin* is the story of a good Samaritan, Thakur Takht Singh, who once saves the life of a seven-year old child from drowning. The child, Hiranman, is the son of Pandit Chintaman who through moneylending at usurious rates, has amassed wealth. The child has slipped into the river, while his mother looks on. None from the crowd goes to rescue the child and it is left to the Thakur, passing that way, to gauge the situation and to jump into the river to save the child's life. As soon as the child is restored to life, the Thakur disappears from the scene. The child's mother searches for the saviour, but there is no trace of him. The child, Hiranman, later grows and amasses wealth with which he buys a zamindari. The zamindari includes the village where lives Thakur Takht Singh. Hiranman is haughty. He resents the attitude of the Thakur and decides to teach him a lesson. The Thakur recognises the young man who is none other than the child whose life he had saved, but not only does he not tell the truth to the new zamindar but instructs his wife



also not to mention it. Hiranman harasses him, attaches all his land. The Thakur does not yield and prefers to die in penury. His wife, to whom Hiranman's mother has taken a fancy, also keeps the secret and dies with it. It is only after the death of the Thakur's wife that Hiranman's mother has a dream that the person who had saved her son's life was none other than the Thakur. She decides to commemorate Takht Singh's memory. On the spot where once stood his house now stands an imposing temple, a brick well and a *dharamshala*—all named after Takht Singh, the man who believed in doing good without any intention of getting recognition or reward.

"Shakir," an ex-member of the Nigam set of writers for *Zamana*, and now editor of *Adib*, asked Premchand why did he use Navabrai and not his other pen-name (Premchand) for *Adib*? Premchand wrote back: "I have promised Munshi Daya Narain Nigam that I won't write under my new pen-name for any other journal. I won't like to do anything that might hurt him."

Daya Narain Nigam was keen to monopolise all that Premchand wrote. There were, therefore, reminders too (and he later increased the honorarium for the short stories).

Says Premchand: "As you wish, I won't send any of my stories to any other journal. I also consider it mean to mention the subject of payment. Short stories need a good deal of mental activity. So long as one is not conscious that it would mean some monetary benefit, the mind does not gravitate towards it. That is the truth. . . . However, what you say about payment is acceptable to me. If the story is short enough to be carried in one issue, it's alright. If, however, it is long enough to be carried in more than one issue, then the payment should be on the number of instalments. I say it again—I have said it earlier, but it seems to have been overlooked—that this amount will go towards supporting the family of a deceased friend. You should not, therefore, accuse me of greed, selfishness and meanness. From the incoherent language of your letter I see that you wanted to say something more, but have not said it."

In the same letter he mentions about his next collection. "Sooner or later the stories beginning with *Agn Kund* will be published in a book form. If you bring it out, I'll be entitled to 25 per cent of the profits; and if I publish them, you will be entitled to 25 per cent of the profits. In other words, you and I

shall have equal share. My interest in them, however, shall remain even after their first publication."

It is significant that it was here, in Mahoba, where the authorities had challenged Premchand, that he finalised his next collection of stories published in *Zamana* and other journals, e.g. *Adib* and *Hamdard*. By March 1913, he had some twenty stories which awaited to be published in the form of a collection of short stories.

The publication of the next collection of short stories (Vol. I of *Prem Pachisi*) involved harassment. For one thing, there was a dearth of Urdu publishers and Premchand had to get it published at his own cost. Once, while annoyed with Nigam in some other connection, as we shall see in the next chapter, he wrote to him: "You had told me that 72 pages of *Prem Pachisi* have been printed. The total expenses incurred came to Rs. 72. By now you owe me Rs. 72. We are, therefore, quits.

"The requirements of a daily newspaper will not perhaps give the press time to attend to the printing of *Prem Pachisi* and the latter, therefore, may not at all be published from your press.

"If, however, you agree to bring it out and share in the profits and losses on a fifty-fifty basis, please get the other 72 pages also printed at your cost, and see that the book is of 144 pages. If the stories selected by me exceed the limit, you may modify the selection. This will be the first volume, to be followed by another one.

"If, on the other hand, your press is unable to find time, I'll be forced to request you to give me my Rs. 72 or send me, by rail parcel, the 72 pages already printed. I'll search out another publisher. And if I fail to get one, I'll publish a book of 72 pages only. The title page and the preface will have to be changed. And if even this is not feasible, I'll lick it. . . . I don't think I am being unreasonable.

"Whatever be your decision, please expedite it. The easiest way of course, would be to send me the printed pages. You have only to instruct the *daftar*. He will pack them and despatch the parcel. It would mean only a little trouble. That's all.

"Left to myself, I would prefer books of 144 pages each, provided, of course, that you have a share in it, and also that provided you publish it soon. Rather than wait for the Doomsday, it is better to get whatever is possible here, and now."

A little later: "Within a week I shall send you some money for paper (for the book). Let me know if this won't be enough for the cost of the other 4½ formes. For the time being I shall publish only part one of the book. Kindly make arrangements for the calligraphy of these pages. The responsibility for any delay, after I send you the money, will not be mine. If the paper is not of the same quality, the book would become a mixed affair. Does not matter. The title page must be attractive. That's all. . . . It is after a good deal of correspondence with many parties that I have decided that I should myself publish it and bear the profit or loss. The publication of the first volume would decide the issue." The book appeared in early 1915.

Premchand's interest in novel-writing also continued and his ideas on the subject crystallised. It was with some concern that he noted the fact that in U.P. in 1909, only two novels had been published in Urdu, a language spoken by a large section of the population. This, he said, was due to the fact that apart from Sharar and Sarshar—who, incidentally, had also given up writing novels—all the so-called novelists had taken up the pen and written imitations of Reynold's novels which were then in vogue. Premchand himself had been advised by his *maulvi* friend to read *Ibrat*, a translation of Reynold's novel, before he should dare to attempt writing!

Works of most writers of this period, who included college students and men of average ability, were normally woven round commonplace romances; impatience of the lover and indifference of the beloved, pangs of separation, followed by obsession on the part of the lover, clandestine meetings arranged through the good offices of common friends, and finally, fulfilment. Novels of this type, according to Premchand, were so many that readers got fed up. In fact, even Sharar's novels, or a book like *Fasana-i-Azad* and translations of Reynold's novels, were very soon dislodged from their position of one-time supreme popularity.

Novel, according to Premchand, was the most important field of literature, being akin to the chairman of a meeting vis-a-vis others present. And to those who ran down fiction, he said that while the leisured classes could afford to read works on history, geography, mathematics, politics, logic, etc. the bulk of the

population which worked for 12 out of the day's 24 hours in earning livelihood, could read either novels or nothing at all.

The Urdu novelists, he declared from the housetop, must realise that the future of the novel in Urdu depended entirely on themselves. They should study the works of great masters—"The Urdu novel disappoints those with banal taste and also those soberly inclined; for it has a Charles Dickens, but no Thackeray, no Charles Meade, no Marie Corelli and no George Eliot"—make a deep study of the workings of human nature and portray true emotions. The literary standards, he held, were rising steadily. Those who had been educated in English desired to find the qualities of the English novel in works of their own language. "A gripping style, new ideas and depth of feelings are the necessary ingredients of a good novel. A study of Bengali novels too would be very instructive." Novel-writing was not an easy task. "No other branch of literature would perhaps require so thorough an absorption of new ideas, great mental activity and a powerful imagination. The novelist must pass sleepless nights, wander alone in idyllic surroundings, take maximum advantage of works of the old masters. . . . Then only would he be able to produce a moving novel. The times when the public got dispirited by half-hearted efforts are gone. Public approach is becoming increasingly critical. And if our novelists wish to live, they must march with the times."

It is in this light, therefore, that we must look at Premchand's next novel, *Jalva-i-Isar* (by Navabrai), published by the Indian Press, Allahabad, in 1912. The novel was perhaps a rehash of his earliest novel entitled *Pratapchandra* (or *Suvama*?) and the hero seems to be modelled on Vivekananda, the subject of an essay by Premchand in the *Zamana* of May 1908. The novel opens with a scene where Suvama prays for a son who would serve the motherland. The son she is blessed with is named Pratapchandra. And while he is still a child, the father goes to *Kumbha mela* and disappears. Pratapchandra's mother pays off the dues incurred by him by selling the family property and keeping only one house, half of which she rents out to Sanjivanlal who has a daughter named Vrijrani or Virjan. A poor widow's only son, Pratap, and a rich man's daughter, Virjan, have fascination for each other. Virjan's father disappears and her mother marries her to Kamlacharan, the son of "Deputy"

Shyamcharan (who is self-respecting and who feels so offended at the inordinately long delay in being called in by the British collector that he never calls on any Briton). Pratapchandra is bitter at Virjan's marriage to good-for-nothing Kamlacharan. Jealous of the latter, he poisons the ears of Virjan's mother who dies. He leaves Banaras for Allahabad where he makes his mark. Virjan falls ill and his very visit to her makes her improve. During a plague epidemic, Kamlacharan's family has to move to the village, and he to Allahabad. Pratap, who is already there, extends help. Assured of a place in her heart for himself, he becomes a friend of Kamlacharan. Away from his wife, however, Kamlacharan takes to bad ways, has an affair with a gardener's daughter. This leads to a situation wherein he has to run for life. He gets into a tram and goes to the railway station where he boards a train without ticket. Faced by a ticket checker, he jumps out of the train and is killed. Virjan thus becomes a widow. Her father-in-law is killed by dacoits and her mother-in-law leaves her in the town and shifts to the village. Pratap wishes to meet her, but cannot trust himself. He runs away to become a *sanyasi*, taking on the name of Swami Balaji. During his travels in the hills near Hardwar he is met by his father who is a sadhu with tremendous powers. Balaji becomes a famous social reformer.

Virjan who has become a famous poetess praises him to her friend Madhavi who is in fact being persuaded to marry Balaji. When Madhavi goes to Balaji's hut, it is, as if by coincidence, on fire. Asked the purpose of her visit, Madhavi tells Balaji of her love for him. She becomes a *sanyasin* and accompanies him on his travels. Such then is the theme of *Jalva-i-Isar*.

*Adib* which carried an announcement of the publication of the book, wrote that *Jalva-i-Isar* (the story of a patriot) is "an original and unsurpassed novel by Munshi Navabrai. In his earlier works, i.e. *Hum Khurma-o-Hum Savab*, *Soz-i-Vatan* and *Kishna*,\* etc. he has already made his mark. It is not necessary, therefore, to say anything more. . . . The author is proud of this work of his and his pride should be a certificate of its quality."

\*The fact that despite the "etc." only three books have been mentioned, seems to confirm the contention that the earlier works, if any, remained unpublished.

*Zamana's* reviewer,\* who praised the patriotism of the author of this book, of "moral and social themes," which, despite its several defects, "deserves to be among the best books of the past year," prophesied: "This early attempt by the capable author tells us that one day he would be a first-rate novelist."

This was in March 1913.

\*The reviewer appears to be a person other than the editor; for he ascribes the authorship to "Naubatrai" who is credited with *Soz-i-Vatan* and *Kishna*!

## To Fresh Avenues

THE INDIGNITY TO which he was subjected over his *Soz-i-Vatan*, had cut Premchand to the quick and he came to nurse hostility to the British bureaucracy in India. So long as the British people keep aloof from Indians, he maintained, Indians too should keep away from them. Only that way could Indians keep their self-respect intact. And it is interesting to note that once when Nigam, several of whose relations held important positions in government service, invited some British officials to his daughter's wedding, Premchand disliked this kowtowing and conveyed his displeasure to his friend in no uncertain terms. "I don't think it was correct of you to have invited them to your house. What would you get out of it all?"

Rebuffed by British authority in India, Premchand was ever in search of ways to find an escape from government service. His ambition was to be associated with an institution like the *Leader* or Indian Press, Allahabad. But his means were extremely limited. One way open to him was to take up a job in a Urdu journal.

The only opening that he could think of was to join Daya Narain Nigam who by now had not only a journal and a printing press, but also a publications branch, and who also planned to bring out a weekly; and later even a daily. Premchand toyed with the idea of joining him. Negotiations went on.

Writes Premchand: "Your weekly should be on the model of the *Comrade*.<sup>\*</sup> The policy should be pro-Hindu. I no longer believe in the Hindustani nation. I also think that to work for that cause is in vain.

<sup>\*</sup>The Calcutta Weekly *Comrade* was started by Maulana Mohammed Ali and its first issue was on the streets of India's first city on January 11, 1911. The journal—"comrade of all and partisan of none"—was hailed as a "new star in the firmament of Indian journalism" and which "took the journalistic world of India by storm."

"The journal's proposed name, *Hindu*, was very apt. It occurs to me, however, that a journal of that name is being published from the Punjab. Nevertheless, I cannot think of a better name than *Raftar-i-Zamana* which, incidentally, had had your approval. I am convinced that there is ample scope for a neatly printed journal espousing the Hindu cause. Our attempt should be in the direction of making the *Raftar-i-Zamana* a powerful organ among the Urdu journals: its views should be commented upon by other journals.

"Now about the articles. You can run a weekly with the help of only one assistant, that is if you could increase your own literary output. I would send you one or two pages every week, without fail; some notes, possibly an editorial, a translation or one thing or another."

In regard to finances: "My present condition does not allow me to help you. Ever since I came here, I have been able to save only Rs. 200, of which Rs. 100 came from my novel, Rs. 30 from the Indian Press, Rs. 30 or Rs. 35 from yourself and an equal amount from the *Educational Gazette*. I have not been able to save a single penny from my salary and my allowances. Of course, call it savings or my earnings, I got my wife a pair of bangles to meet her complaint of several years' standing. And I have not yet got over it.

"This being so, what can I do to assist you? My present salary is only Rs. 60, in addition to Rs. 40 on an average from other sources. Despite my extreme care I am far from being prosperous. I don't know how my expenses have increased since my days at Kanpur where I lived within Rs. 40. Even double the amount does not suffice here. And if I effect a reduction in expenditure, it would affect not only me but others too. You say that you will arrange for Rs. 4,000. If you can arrange for Rs. 4,000 why should there be any difficulty to arrange Rs. 360?

"Six months or so after running the paper I would be in a position to decide which course would be better for me. I would leave this post, come to you and unhesitatingly work as hard as is necessary. It is just possible I may be able to run the paper. If it succeeds after six months, I would resign my job and settle down. Otherwise, I would come back to my present work. It is for you now to ask for my services immediately or after you are satisfied with the working of the paper."



About the terms for joining Nigam: "I live on about Rs. 60 a month. While I say this, I am being frank, because I consider you not only a friend but also a sympathiser and a brother. I am not a shirker; nor do I want to pose as a famous writer. I just need subsistence, and subsistence is possible on at least Rs. 60."

Further, a word of caution: "Uptil now you have run the *Zamana* as your personal journal; the expenses of the journal and the expenses on your own person have fallen under the same head. Consequently, you have faced financial stringency. Please forgive me when I say that recently your personal expenses have gone up. The expenditure on *Raftar-i-Zamana* need not be mixed up with your personal expenses. Its income and expenditure would be entirely separate from your out-of-pocket expenses. This is the only way we can work together."

At a later stage we find the negotiations to make Premchand join hands with Nigam in bringing out an Urdu daily, *Azad*, leading to a misunderstanding. Details of the paper and Premchand's assignment were to be discussed during the vacation when the latter visited Nigam at Kanpur. Premchand hoped that initiative in this regard would be taken by Nigam. And as the subject was not even broached by Nigam—Premchand himself would not raise it—he returned to his post. Nigam, who was banking on Premchand's staying back, did not like it, and it seems he told Premchand peremptorily that he had let him down.

Writes Premchand to Nigam: "Perhaps my pleading not guilty means nothing to you. You feel proud to have a few relations in government service, and perhaps think that you know all about government service rules. Please excuse me if I tell you that if, like myself, you had worked the major part of your life in government service, you would not have unhesitatingly used the words which you have written to me. I made all possible efforts to get leave. I sent two applications and a telegram. Copies of applications, submitted late, are still with me. Nevertheless, it is true that I did not attempt to send a medical certificate—I had no hope of getting one here. If you blame me for the delay in applying late, my responsibility at the most would not exceed ten annas in a rupee.

"You did not at all directly mention about the daily newspaper during the first week of my stay at Kanpur. The mention was made only when my leave was about to expire. And you

decided about it when I was left with only three days' leave. In these circumstances, what could an unresourceful man like myself do except to try his best to extend leave and, when this was not possible, return to his post? For, otherwise, can you tell me with what object, and under what pressure, I should have started work under the scheme and then run away? After all you did not, could not, force me. Admittedly also, you did not force me to make any sacrifice. Nor do I say that I made any. It would have been all to my financial advantage. And what was there to dishearten me?

"I reached Hamirpur just twenty four hours before my leave was to expire. I left on the 13th evening, and the 14th being a Sunday, the Deputy Inspector was on tour. There was none in Hamirpur whom I could consult—there being not many there whom I know—and I rushed to this place, Mahoba. In fact, I was late by a day in joining duty, and I had to give an explanation for this lapse. This then is my defence.

"To turn to the other aspect, you need not be angry at my running away. The type of paper that you wish to bring out, i.e. one for which one does not have to write much of original stuff, can be brought out by a man of ordinary ability and talent, paid somewhat low, and at a lesser cost. Indeed, it is being already brought out that way. I am not aware of its degree of success, but I do think its quality has not fallen.

"I am not aware of all the arrangements you have made for the daily *Azad* and have no right to ask you about it either. Nevertheless, I am certain that the necessary arrangements must have been made, and that after October 18, you would not need any special material of particular interest to that paper."

Finally, "please excuse me at least on one count, if on no other, namely, that it is this person who was responsible for giving practical shape to the ambition for a daily newspaper. It is with some difficulty that the wheel of a coach first moves, but, having once moved, it moves along."

Subsequently: "Regarding the proposal about *Avadh Akhbar*,\*

\**Avadh Akhbar* was an Urdu daily published from the Navalkishore Bhargava Press, Lucknow. It was started in 1859 (*sic*) as a weekly and, after some years became a daily. The paper had a famous editor in Pandit Ratan Nath Sarshar, who wrote the *Fasana-i-Azad*, a two page sheet of which appeared every day. This *Fasana* boosted up the paper's

my income here in Mahoba is not more than Rs. 80 per mensem, excluding, of course, the T.A. and salary of menials. . . . I presume the same position would hold good there too. While the other duties would be the same, the nature of work would be very different. Despite slavery, there is a good deal of freedom here. There is none superior to me and none asks for my explanation. Therefore, I feel somewhat free. I shudder at the idea of daily attendance from 10 A.M. to 5 P.M. and the mental strain of work on a daily newspaper, and cannot muster enough courage. Literary work is only by way of recreation. It would later become a source of livelihood.

"From the point of view of Chhutak's\* education, and of my own future too, this certainly is not a bad offer. But the very thought of strenuous work stands in the way of my deciding finally. At the moment, I am uncertain. If, however, there is an occasion, please do sound the proprietor. Maybe, I would make up my mind by then.

"Anyway, if you go over to *Avadh Akhbar*, it'll be time to worry about the publication of my collection of stories. Maybe, your switch over to *Avadh Akhbar* will improve my prospects also. Why should I be spilling my heart's blood, or the blood of my fingers, anywhere else? Why should I look up to others if it were valued at home?"

It is interesting to note the new themes of these "drops of blood" from the heart or fingers. In them we see a steady change. *Tiriya Charitra* is the story of Magandas, adopted son of a millionaire who has half a dozen issueless wives. The adopted son, circulation. The general standard of the paper was high. It was printed on brownish or reddish paper, while *Fasana-i-Azad* on white sheet. The standard of translation from English telegrams published in the *Pioneer* was very poor. It was difficult to understand the translation without the help of the original in English. The paper had no policy. Editorials were few and far between. Nawalkishore was a loyalist and the paper supported the bureaucracy. It contained neither politics nor touched on social reforms. Indeed, for these weaknesses this daily was made fun of by its rival *Avadh Punch* as "Bania Akhbar." The staff of *Avadh Akhbar*—its manager, several clerks and several *qatibs*—was well paid. It had printing facilities which no other Urdu paper could have afforded before. The press was good and undertook publication of books, religious and otherwise. These were very popular. (*The Quran*, published by this press, it is said, held the field for a long time!)

\*Premchand's stepbrother Mahtab Rai.

brought up in great comfort, is married to the daughter of another wealthy man. Away from his home, Magandas gets a telegraphic intimation that one of his stepmothers has given birth to a son. He decides not to undergo the humiliating process of partition of family property and goes to his wife's place. Before entering the house, however, he feels that she too is a rich man's daughter and would not be able to adjust herself to the life of a poor man. He does not meet her and, without revealing his identity, takes up a small job. His wife, however, comes to know and, without his knowledge, she comes to him as the niece of a gardener. The two have an affair. Later, he learns of the death of his father and also his stepbrother, and is persuaded to accept the family assets and liabilities. He returns home. His wife too intimates her arrival. When the two reunite, it is the reunion of the husband and the "gardener's niece." The two are true to each other and visit the place of their romance once a year to keep that memory evergreen.

*Amavas ki Raat* is a story which portrays a change of heart in a *vaid* whose love for money makes him callous to the sufferings of his patients as, for instance, the suffering of Girija, the wife of Pandit Devdutt, who has fallen on evil days. On the auspicious day of Diwali, Girija who is on death bed, expresses a desire to get up to light the lamps. But she is too ill. Despite persistent requests from Devdutt, her husband, the *vaid* is busy drafting advertisements for his medicines rather than devoting any attention to his patients. What stands between Girija's life and the *vaid's* attention is Devdutt's poverty. Comes a young Thakur, with the intention of paying off the principal of twenty-five thousand rupees and the compound interest of fifty thousand to Devdutt in return for the loan taken by his grandfather from Devdutt's grandfather. Devdutt is happy and searches for the document to be returned to the young Thakur. In the meantime, Girija is dead.

Devdutt, who has accepted the seventy-five thousand rupees, presents it to the *vaid* and tells him: "This is in lieu of my gratitude and fees due to you. I request you now to make Girija open her eyes just once. To you the love for money is much more than the love for human life, and here I give you money. To me wealth, compared to life, has no value." The *vaid* feels sorry and remorseful for his attitude towards the patients and

promises never to be so callous. "These words came from the depth of the vaid's heart."

*Nigah-e-Naaz* is the story of a romantically inclined married woman whose husband is away for studies and who, along with her lawyer brother, is fond of theatrical performances. At one of the performances, she meets a young man with whom she starts correspondence. The young man is the manager of a steel works in Lucknow. Ultimately, the young man is arrested and he is being tried in a court of law. The woman, Kamini, denies any acquaintance with the young man and says that she had seen him first when he was being caught red-handed by her brother and two servants at the dead of night. During interrogation the defendant's counsel questions her about her letters to the young man. She denies and piteously looks at the accused, appealing to him, as it were, to save her honour. The young man shields her and pleads guilty to the charges. Chivalry!

*Milaap* is the story of a rich man's young son who elopes with a young widow to Calcutta and starts living a life of sin. He gets a daughter by her, but dares not return to the village for fear of public odium. When, however, his father dies, he has to return. Unwilling to take his "wife" back to the village, he plays a ruse and manages events in a way that there is a presumption that he has been murdered. While his wife, true to his memory, stitches clothes to feed herself and her daughter, the youngman is back in his home where he gets married. His wife, however, dies of tuberculosis. He marries again, and the second wife, along with the son, also dies—of plague. In the end, he thinks of his happy days with the widow, returns to Calcutta, and meets his beloved who finds it hard to believe. Such is the reunion.

*Andher* is the exposure of the tyrannies of the police. A villager, Gopal, who acquits himself well in a wrestling bout with the ace wrestler from the neighbouring village, incurs the hostility of the inhabitants of the other village and is beaten up mercilessly. While he is confined to bed, comes the police inspector who takes the villagers to task for not lodging a report. The police inspector wants his price, of fifty rupees, for hushing up the case of this "lapse" on the part of the villagers. This "fine" is to be levied by the headman on the person who has been beaten up for upholding the prestige of the village. The headman persuades Gopal's wife to pay up the money. In fact, he keeps

half of it for himself and pays the rest to the police inspector. Everyone in the village is grateful to Satyanarain, the Almighty, for protecting the honour of Gopal and, on behalf of Gopal, they organise a *katha* for Satyanarain in gratitude for his protection! According to Gopal, however, there was no protection by Satyanarain and there was only injustice.

*Sirf ek Avaz* has the eradication of untouchability as its principal theme. An old Thakur who goes to the Ganga on the occasion of lunar eclipse for a bath, listens to a social reformer who harangues his audience for washing off the stain of untouchability from the face of society. "Let's pledge ourselves that from today we shall deal with the untouchables as our own brothers, share their pleasures and sorrows and get together for common festivities. This, I tell you, is no obligation on these unfortunate ones. It is a question of life and death for the nation." While the so-called enlightened ones only listen to the reformer as a recreation, to be forgotten the very next moment, this old Thakur who does not talk about his religious beliefs but practises them, is the only one to take the pledge—to the surprise of all the "educated and enlightened" ones!

*Banka Zamindar* is the story of a lawyer who acquires a big estate, *zamindari*, and wishes to exact high rental for the land. That, at any rate, is the first impression. His demand for three years' revenue in advance and his refusal to listen to any entreaties of the tenants leads to their eviction. Subsequently, he rents it out to another group of cultivators, tyrannizes them and evicts them also. Then comes a group of nomads, *banjaras*, who take on the land and start living in the deserted village. The zamindar tries to coerce them also and there is an argument. When he asks them to vacate the land they unitedly defy the zamindar. "This is our land," says their headman, "and we refuse to vacate it." A pitched battle is fought, and the *banjaras* win. The zamindar whose men have been defeated, now comes round and poses as their friend. "I have evicted many groups of tillers because they were weak. I wished to have people with stout hearts, people who could stand up against any tyranny, people who could fight for their rights. At last I have succeeded in finding such people. I now transfer my lands to you who till it." The tenants now worship his memory as also the memory of the headman who fought for them.

*Anaath Larki* is the story of a big *seth* won over by the affection of a little schoolgirl whose father is dead and whose mother stitches clothes to earn a living. The *seth* likes being addressed to as "father" by the girl and pays for her education. The girl gradually endears herself to the *seth*'s family and is accepted ultimately as the *seth*'s daughter-in-law.

*Khoon-i-Safed* is the story of the son of a peasant being ostracised by the village society for having lived in the camp of Christian missionaries. The peasant, during a famine, disposes of everything and leaves his land to become a labourer. Unable to feed his family, he finds that his hungry son is attracted to a Christian missionary camping there; the boy is tempted to visit the missionary who gives him delicacies every day. One day, the child leaves his home and follows the missionary to another town, whence he is sent away to a camp at Poona. The son is accepted in the Christian fold. Years later, when he returns home, the village people are unable to accept him. He feels offended, and, knowing fully well that his parents are deeply attached to him, he realises that his blood obviously is different from theirs now, and returns to the fold of Christian missionaries!

*Shikari Rajkumar* is the story of a hunter prince who shoots a deer. Separated from his colleagues, he is met by a hefty *sanyasi* who lifts the dead animal on his shoulder and leads the hunter to his abode in the dense forest. The prince is greatly influenced by the personality of the *sanyasi* who promises him "better hunting." The two go out on an expedition led by the *sanyasi*. The prince is taken to a den of dacoits, the abode of a priest who is a debauch, and to a court of justice where the judge demands a bribe of a thousand rupees as his price to let off one who has misappropriated the property of a widow. The prince's blood boils. The *sanyasi* cools him down and tells him that the job of a good hunter is not to kill innocent birds but to kill these "beasts" prowling about in the garb of dacoits, priests and the so-called "dispensers of justice."

*Maut aur Zindagi*, which was later published as *Amrit*, shows the fulfilment of a poet's life.

While these stories, published in his friend Nigam's journal *Zamana*, indicate a purposive trend which later came to dominate Premchand's works, there were other stories which he sent to other journals, e.g. *Karmon ka Phal*, wherein one afflicted

with a consciousness of his guilt for damaging someone's home and domestic peace, feels remorseful; and *Manavan*, which shows how a husband has to pacify his angry wife.

Premchand himself was still not certain about the style that he should adopt. He was experimenting with the styles and themes adopted by the veterans. In a letter he told Nigam that sometimes he followed the style of Bankim Chandra Chatterji and, at others, that of Shams-ul-Ulema Azad Dehlavi. These days, Premchand added, "I have been reading the stories of Count Tolstoy,\* and I must admit that I have been deeply influenced by them. The short story being sent herewith does not attempt to make use of the niceties of language and narrates a simple event in a simple way."

Some times afterwards he told another friend that he was very fond of his story *Manzil-i-Maqsood* and that he would like to write in the same vein. "But my pen does not now move in that direction."

\*Premchand is reported to have "dressed" some twenty stories by Count Tolstoy in Indian garb and got them published under the title *Prem Prabhakar*.



## Over To Hindi

NEARING THE END of thirty-two years, Premchand, as a Sub-deputy Inspector of Schools, appears to have been full of life and vitality. A picture of his at that time shows Premchand dressed in western style trousers and an open collar jacket, with a muffler round his neck. His face is in full bloom, his forehead wide, his handle-bar moustache stretching from one side of the face to the other.

Premchand looked healthy, but all was not well with him. One of the reasons was that his food habits were somewhat indisciplined. He could be easily tempted by tasty food to violate any restriction on eating.

In the district of Hamirpur where Premchand had to be continuously on tour, the food that he got was of low nutritive value. Fresh vegetables were just not available even during summer months and he had, therefore, to eat dried up tubulars which were hard to digest.

Premchand himself tells us that he felt uncomfortable after eating *arbi* regularly. But there was no way out. For some "inexplicable" reason, he says, he felt that *ajvain* was an antidote against the bad effects of this vegetable. He, therefore, ate them together. His appetite improved, and he thought that the diet, combined with the climate of Bundelkhand, had done him good.

Once he felt so severe a stomachache that, like a fish out of water, he writhed in pain the whole day long. He tried everything that was available in the village—hot water bottle, *phakki* and *jamun arak*—but there was no relief. Next day he got an attack of dysentery. The pain disappeared, but there was mucous.

Soon afterwards he visited a town where the local police inspector invited him to stay with him in his quarters inside the police station and also to dine with him. The daily fare of *dal*,

etc. having got on his nerves, he agreed to stay there. He thought, he would get some delicious food for a change. His guess was right. The police inspector served him *ziminqand*, *pulao* and *dahi vada*. Premchand was careful. He ate only two mouthfuls of *ziminqand*. Within two hours of his going into the police inspector's thatched hut, however, he felt severe pain, and writhed the whole night and the following day. He drank soda water, and then vomitted. Having given up *arbi*, he thought his pain this time was due to *ziminqand*. He, therefore, gave up *ziminqand* also, and in later years "trembled" at the sight of these two vegetables. By June 1913, his health was weak, and we find him thinking of regular treatment at Kanpur. And it was about this time that his wife delivered another daughter—Kamala.

His illness interfered with his literary output. It is not without significance that between the publication of *Banka Zamin-dar* in *Zamana*, and his next story, *Anaath Larki*, there was a gap of eight months.

Dysentery had made his body its abode. There was ceaseless disorder of stomach. There was wind too. And although he would take a walk of four to five miles regularly, take exercise and eat at regular hours, in addition to some medicine or the other, the dysentery would not leave him and his body "disintegrated." He visited Kanpur for treatment and also underwent *yunani* and allopathic courses at Allahabad for a whole month, followed by four months' leave for the purpose. But all this was in vain. He thought of pension on grounds of invalidity. By June 1914 he tells Nigam: "My digestion is very bad. I have become weak, so weak in fact that you may have difficulty in recognising me even. I am going down and down." He asked for a transfer. While he had wanted Kanpur or Rohelkhand, he was sent, in July 1914, to Basti, in the Himalayan foothills known as the Terai. He stayed with his brother-in-law (wife's sister's husband) who was in the postal department, and subsequently took up a house on rent. His short stories at this time continued to be uneven in themes and treatment, sentimental or reflecting the Indian mind and traditions.

*Shaamat-i-Aimal* which presumably appeared later as *Khak-i-Parvana*, shows the remorse of a husband over being indifferent and callous to the needs of the family which had to be looked after by the benevolent ruler.

*Pachhtava* is on the model of his earlier *Banka Zamindar* and *Namak ka Darogha*. Herein an educated Brahmin with a high sense of honesty and integrity, takes up employment with a zamindar. While the zamindar is a tyrant, his agent believes in truth, correct behaviour and in winning over the tenants through sympathy and honesty. The employer does not agree with the ways of his agent who is forced to quit. Soon afterwards, however, he finds that his tenants who had begun worshipping the agent as a *deota*, come and pay off their arrears pending for years. The zamindar is convinced of the value of honesty and sympathy and wants his agent back. Taken seriously ill, he tells his wife before his death that the one person to whose care he was leaving her and his children was his Brahmin agent.

*Marham* is the story of two Thakur brothers and a sister, all attached to each other and unmarried. Many a person promises to get wives for the Thakurs. The two are naive and easily taken in. Among those who dupe them is a new revenue official who comes to the village. He is young and clever. He carries on a romance with the sister of the two Thakurs whom he befriends. When told of the degree of liberties that he took in their absence, the two Thakurs, bent upon protecting their honour, murder the man. There is a trial, and it is their sister who tells the story how her two brothers took out the axe and sharpened it to murder the man, her lover. The two are sentenced to transportation for life. The sister, with her only support in life gone, runs from pillar to post and is helped by an old woman. After a lapse of fourteen years, she goes to the judge who is going to receive her brothers in Calcutta on their return from the Andamans. There she meets her two brothers. All the bitterness and anger is gone. Time proves to be the balm that has healed up everything and filled the vacuum.

In *Ghairat ki Katar*, a woman puts her ex-lover, who in a revengeful mood wishes to murder her, to shame.

Between the publication of this story in *Zamana* and the earlier story, *Marham*, there was a gap of six months during which Premchand was either sending his stories to other journals which made better payments or he was unwell. The latter seems more likely.

"Health is a great thing," he told Nigam. "One who hasn't bothered about it can later do nothing but cry and feel sorry.

Sanatogen benefits everybody. But even this has done me little good. You had advised me to take a walk every day. I am following your advice and have been walking three to four miles daily during the last five days. I hope it will improve my health." He had little zest for life.

He still wished to resign his government job and take to journalism—and literature. He told Nigam: "I have received yours of November 5 today, i.e. on the tenth (there being only one post office within twenty miles or so). This delay is distressing, and is of little encouragement to take to journalism. That Pandit Vishwanath is bringing out a paper is good news. In my present circumstances, I am not at all fit for a daily newspaper. And how would I bear the burden of both Urdu and Hindi editions? If I had wanted to work for a newspaper, *Azad* was not a bad proposition.

"You have left no stones unturned to boost me. But I was so unlucky that, despite the take off, I couldn't fly; and in fact am afraid of falling down. Otherwise, like Sheobrat Lal Varman, I also could have passed my days in comfort.

"Kindly publish my book of stories soon so that the encouragement from Part I (*Prem Pachisi*), should arouse me to devote time to Part II—and also bring in some money.

"My total savings is about five to six hundred. I'll write a few books, publish them and spend this amount on my books. And when I have earned some literary fame, I shall start a monthly journal and earn my living. If I die earlier, that'll be the end of it for me.

"The correct thing for me to do is to take up the job of a teacher in a private school which could get me Rs. 50—if you come to hear of a job in a private school, please remember me, because I am thoroughly disgusted with my present work—and to serve *Zamana* and *Azad*. This would bring me, on an average, sixty to seventy. I do not aspire for more and, frankly, there is no chance of my getting more. Why then should I fight against Fate?" In another letter: "Urdu is in a bad way. Journalism's way is a hard one. None of the journals is prospering. This is a dog's life."

On September 4, 1914, he wrote to Nigam: "I have already placed an order for the *Statesman* and shall make arrangements to ensure regular supply of my mail to me (on tour). This will

help me write editorial notes for *Azad*. You had arranged for the *Leader*. While this paper may be alright for the ordinary reader, it is not of much use to one who has to work as a journalist. When, therefore, I start getting the *Statesman*, the *Leader* may be stopped. If you send me fifteen rupees, I shall be extremely grateful. . . . Owing to various factors, I am now empty-handed. I have placed an order for beds, but haven't yet been in a position to place one for a milch cow. (My health is not well.) I am worried about it. I am using Sanatogen which may soon become difficult to obtain. I do not know many people in Basti yet. The Deputy Inspector is the only one known to me. Thanks to the *Pratap*, I have come to know Pandit Mannan Dwivedi, *tehsildar* of Domariaganj. I haven't yet made up my mind whether to make Basti my headquarters or Domariaganj."

Fresh avenues were opening up in the field of Hindi where, thanks to a number of new journals that came out in that language, *Khari boli* was making swift advance. Premchand too was attracted. Among the influences which made him gravitate to Hindi was his contact with Mannan Dwivedi (Gajpuri), a Hindi litterateur, who was then posted as a *tehsildar* at Domariaganj. Whenever Premchand visited Domariaganj, he would stop over with Dwivedi. The two would discuss Hindi and Sanskrit literature. Dwivedi\* was a "delightful companion, always full of scintillating humour and a zest for life." He possibly had something to do with Premchand being attracted to Kalidas, Bihari and Keshav, writers who became the subject for introduction by him to the Urdu reading public through the columns of *Zamana*. (In a letter to Nigam a year earlier he had said: "You may consider me to be the editor of your Hindi department. I shall translate important, useful and interesting items for your journals and newspapers, also some notes and critical assessments. I shall also send you brief worthwhile thumbnail sketches of Hindi poets.")

Another important influence was Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, a dynamic leader of men and a litterateur, who had just started

\*Mannan Dwivedi Gajpuri who wrote the Foreword to Premchand's first collection of Hindi short stories, *Sapta Saroj*, was himself the subject of an article by Premchand in the *Zamana* of December 1921. Gajpuri gave Premchand such journals as *Modern Review* and *Indian Review*.

his Hindi journal, the *Pratap*, from Kanpur. Vidyarthi who was a friend of Gajpuri's,<sup>1</sup> asked Premchand for a contribution, and the latter sent him one. It seems to have appeared in the 1914 *Vijaya Dashami* number of the *Pratap*.

When, a little later, Premchand visited Kanpur, he took the opportunity of calling on Vidyarthi, and saw him doing most of the work all by himself. "He is a very hard working man, Vidyarthiji," he told his wife on return to Basti. "He does most of the work in the press with his own hands. This I consider to be real self-help. Our country, I am convinced, needs people of this type, those who make their lives a success largely through their own efforts. At times, I tell you, I feel like resigning my job, settling down in a secluded corner and devoting my life to the service of literature. But I am not all that fortunate. I don't have even a little piece of agricultural land which could meet the family's requirements of foodgrains." The influence of these Hindi litterateurs, anyway, seems to have been deep.

Meanwhile, his dysentery aggravated and he lost appetite. His father-in-law called him to Allahabad for treatment. But the treatment did him little good. While Mrs. Premchand stayed back, he returned to Basti alone. As he was strongly advised to take more leave and get himself treated, he asked for six months' and got four months' leave on half pay, i.e. at Rs. 30 per month, of which he sent Rs. 15 to his stepbrother then studying at Jhansi, and Rs. 10 to the stepmother. Obviously, he was living on his writings.

He got himself treated at the Medical College, Lucknow, and at Kanpur. This also proved in vain. He was back again in Basti.

Premchand had sent for his wife in December 1914, but 'his father-in-law thought that her staying back would be of help to Premchand financially, and refused permission. Premchand again sent for her in April of the following year. The father-in-law stuck to his view. But Premchand's message this time was firm. "Should a husband, who is poor and ill, not be entitled to take his wife and children with him?" This worked and Mrs. Premchand came to him. The family moved to Lamhi on two months' vacation. He tried indigenous medicines at Banaras and would walk daily from Lamhi and back.

The dysentery, however, aggravated. His food too wasn't good; "the dal contained lot of chillies." He resumed duty at

Basti. Fifteen days later he again came back to Lamhi and it was from Lamhi itself that he asked for a transfer. There was no response from the bosses. Once Premchand, accompanied by his wife and their two-year old daughter Kamla, started for Allahabad. They had to cross the Sarju by a steamer. While his wife sat at his feet, Premchand, sitting on a bench and fondling the child, was engaged in talking to another passenger who sat next to him, and was completely oblivious of a young man's gaze fixed on his wife. Shivrani Devi tells us that she drew closer to him in order to attract his attention, but Premchand was lost in discussion. Then she pressed his feet and told him to look at the young man of twenty-five advancing towards her. Premchand noticed his behaviour and was furious. He handed over the child to his wife and jumped at the throat of the young man and dragged him for some distance.

"Should I throw you into the river?" he asked of him.

"What have I done except occupying the little space that I did?" said the young man.

"Was there space to stand on?" asked Premchand. "You nearly perched on the shoulders of women. Another word from you, and I shall push you into the river."

"You are not the only one who has paid the fare? I too have paid the fare and am entitled to travel."

"Have you paid the fare to travel or to sit on the shoulders of others?"

And while Premchand gave vent to his anger, he trembled with rage. It was a sorry spectacle; for, his health was not at all good and he was going to Allahabad to get himself treated.

In Allahabad, he sought an interview with the Director of Instruction and told him that the climate of Basti did not suit him.

"Neither Mahoba nor Basti suits you," said his boss. "Where else can I send you? As your substantive appointment is that of a teacher, on Rs. 60 per month, can you go back to it?"

Premchand conferred with his wife, and both agreed that the proposal be accepted. "Let me see when the Director sends me back to a teacher's job," he wrote to Nigam after sending in his acceptance. "I am fed up and prefer teaching to this (touring) job, even though it would bring me less. I'll gladly accept even fifty rupees."

In May 1915, the family returned to Basti, where Premchand rented a house at four rupees a month, in a predominantly Muslim locality. His neighbours were very poor, their mud houses mostly dilapidated.

The transfer to the high school meant an end to the touring job and staying in Basti as a teacher on Rs. 60, of which Rs. 10 went to the stepmother.

Incidentally, it was here in Basti that Shivrani Devi came to know that Premchand's first wife was still alive (but not that he secretly sent her some money). And she knew it only when she eavesdropped on the conversation at the doorstep between Premchand and his first wife's brother who was fondling Premchand's infant daughter, Kamla.

"Who was it?" she asked him when the visitor was gone.

"Some gentleman," said Premchand.

"I did not expect you'd tell me a lie. You said your first wife was dead."

"A person is alive only when you consider her alive. When you consider her dead, she's dead."

"I won't accept this position. You should go and fetch her."

"No, I won't go to fetch her."

"Why wouldn't you? Didn't you enter into wedlock with her?"

"I didn't. My father married me to her."

"You support the family of your father's but won't support your own wife! This, I think, is funny."

"Say what you will. But I won't go to fetch her."

"If you fetch her—as you should—I'll undertake all responsibility."

"You two will quarrel."

"I undertake never to mention anything on the subject. We'll pull on."

"You two may somehow get on, but it will be hell for me."

He did not agree to fetch her. Shivrani Devi reportedly took the initiative to invite her, but the first Mrs. Premchand insisted that she would go to her husband only if he went to fetch her. The two corresponded for some years, but never met. The subject does not seem to have been discussed with the same degree of seriousness on any other occasion. In any case, Premchand's domestic life was happy.



Acceptance by him of the job of a school teacher rid him of touring duties, and he had a brief spell which he devoted to planning for books, to the preparation for his Intermediate examination and, of course, to his short stories.

*Prem Pachisi's* first volume, of twelve stories, had now been printed by the Zamana Press at the author's own cost. The Foreword, it appears from one of his letters, was written by one of Nigam's own friends who had praised him a little too much. Premchand was keen that the praise be milder. He, therefore, suggested another name—that of Farouq Shahpuri—and himself wrote a blurb: "If you approve of this, please use it; it will reduce your botheration."

*Prem Pachisi*, Premchand hoped, might win one of the prizes then being awarded for books. He asked Nigam about the efforts that the latter was putting in towards that end.

The sale of the first volume was poor. This, however, did not deter Premchand from preparing the manuscript of the second volume of *Prem Pachisi* for press. Premchand asked Nigam about the advisability of placing the second volume of *Prem Pachisi* with Dairatul Adab, Delhi, and a month later followed it up with the desire that Nigam should himself publish the second volume. "Nothing could be better than your own press provided, of course, it could publish it quickly. If you agree, let us decide about the terms. On my part I'll accept whatever you decide."

Premchand at this time was interested in writing some textbooks which meant then, as they do now, money. In the letter quoted above, he told Nigam: "An announcement has recently been made in regard to prizes for books. If you wish to enter the field, I am prepared to collaborate with you. These days, I am thinking of sixty-four-page biographies of the governors, on the model of the 'Rulers of India' series."

The proposal, it may be mentioned, seems to have been made when Premchand was preparing for the Intermediate examination, to which he devoted one hour a day.

Here is his daily routine: he would rise at four o'clock in the morning, light the kerosene lamp kept by his bedside, and read textbooks for an hour or so in the dim light. Then came ablutions, a light breakfast, followed by literary work. At nine o'clock, he would get ready for the school, and go there by

*tonga*. He would remain at the school until four o'clock, and then walk back home, buying vegetables, etc. on the way. The time between his return to home and six o'clock in the evening would be spent in fondling his daughter or playing with the neighbours' children, or in *tete-a-tete*. This was followed by literary work for journals for two hours.

It is necessary here to refer briefly to Premchand's efforts to secure higher education, in which his progress had been cut short after his Matriculation owing to gruelling poverty. Rather than retire as a low-paid teacher, he naturally aspired to take a Master's degree which would make it possible for him to become a head-master.

On June 26, 1915, he tells Nigam: "I have decided to take an F.A. degree; for, I find from my experience that without a B.A. degree, it is difficult to succeed in the literary field. I have been writing novels, short stories during the previous several years. Should, however, I be thrown out of employment, there is no journal or newspaper that could pay me enough to live on. I have practised this art for some ten or eleven years, but now I find that I have got little benefit out of it. When a few friends boost one up, one is happy. But this is not enough. As a routine I'll continue doing a bit of writing, but I cannot devote all my energies to it.

"On the other hand, I think that with three years' work, I can succeed in getting a B.A. degree. This would mean something in old age. I say 'old age' deliberately, even though I should be the last person to mention such a thing: for, is there one who is as aged as myself?"

Being a teacher, he could appear as a private candidate. In fact, we know that even before his transfer to Basti he had tried to pass his Intermediate examination twice, but had failed. The failure, according to him, was due to his weak mathematics which then was a compulsory subject. His hopes brightened up when the Allahabad University declared that in future Mathematics would no longer be compulsory, but only optional. Premchand offered English, Persian, Modern History and Logic, and got through the examination in Second Division in 1916,\* when he was thirty-six—18 years after Matriculation.

\*The date is as given in his certificate, kept in the Ramratan Pustak Bhavan, Banaras. Nigam erroneously refers to the year as 1910. Maybe,

While Premchand was aspiring for higher education, there was also the old ambition of resigning from government service and taking up journalism and literature, the two for him then being synonymous. "What I detest most," he wrote, "is subordination. . . . I want to do something wherein my wishes should be paramount and none should be able to find fault with me. Whether I work throughout the day and night or take things easy, should depend entirely on my own sweet will. And when I say this, I know fully well that it is possible only if I am my own boss."

We, therefore, find Premchand negotiating terms for entering as a partner in the *Zamana* venture. The journal, he told Nigam, was not at all a paying concern. "It had suffered losses which might amount to about three to four thousand. In the market, however, the journal would never fetch as much. There are, of course, several other reasons too for these losses, but it is not necessary to go into the details here.

"Anyway, I put its goodwill at one thousand. I'd do so because its good name is blended with bad name too. According to my way of thinking, if one thousand rupees were spent on a competently edited monthly journal, it could fetch that much. If the value of the good name is put at one thousand, its half would be five hundred, and I undertake to pay this amount in two to three years. I am even agreeable to pay interest at the market rate.

"After my six months' leave, I have only eight hundred rupees left. Of this amount, I have given three hundred to three parties on interest at the rate of eighteen per cent. My cash balance at this time is only five hundred and I consider this as my reserve until the time *Zamana* starts paying me. And who knows how long one may have to wait for that auspicious day!

"In sum, therefore, I am incapable of shouldering financial responsibilities. If during this time, Chhatak gets married, even this amount would perhaps pass out of my hands. What I have stated about my financial straits is absolutely true, every word of it. If you discern selfishness in my proposition, please pardon me. I have thus left all the financial burdens to you.

"I am ready to take over the editorial charge of *Zamana* and, to a large extent, also the managerial charge. You would use the thought of the year when Premchand first appeared for the Intermediate examination.

your standing, and your personal influence and work as much as you think proper for securing advertisement. I would try my utmost to keep down the expenses as far as possible. But the financial charge would be totally yours, i.e. paper, calligraphy, printing, cutting, postal charges. You will arrange to make monthly payments under all these heads.

"The standing arrears would be kept entirely separate. Whatever you invest after the date of partnership will be paid to you either at the end of every month or during December and January. We shall equally share the profits and the losses. I think we shall be able to pay off by January. If it is still in deficit, and we need more money for the next year, we shall devise other ways and means. Until the time, however, these commitments are not met, you would not, as far as possible, take anything out of the earnings. The editor's name would be yours, or it could be mine. If your name alone brings better results, I will have no objection. Otherwise, my name would have to be shown as Joint Editor.

"If these conditions, with some modifications, are agreed to, we shall bring out four or five issues on time before next December, create an impression and start in January with better prospects."

A month later: "One requires money to launch any new venture. And you don't have money. Nor for that matter have I. Tell me, then, how can any scheme work? You cannot have enterprise with empty pockets or with vain talk; and you would agree with me that a man must also save a little bit. That's all that I have. I don't have so much as to entertain any business schemes.

"You ask me to sacrifice, but and I do not consider myself capable of any sacrifice. I have a commitment of sixty rupees a month, which I cannot shake off. If you can, please show me the way out, so that, while earning my bread, I can spend on the enterprise. The first requisite would, of course, be to bring forth some money.

"I came to you when I was on leave, but felt that the atmosphere was not conducive. I saw the financial difficulties. Because of these, I thought it unnecessary to get involved. If your financial condition improves, then you call me, and I shall come and we shall devise ways through mutual consultations.

"... I want to do a lot, but I have neither enterprise nor money. You have enterprise, but little money. How can we get along till the time a financier comes along?"

His short stories any way continued. Among those written at this time was *Beti ka Dhan*. In this, an upright peasant comes to a sad pass when, owing to the indifference of his three sons and their wives, he is forced to accept the ornaments of his daughter to pawn them in order to get his house freed of attachment as a result of proceedings initiated and won by the zamindar whom he has alienated. The peasant feels remorseful, for, in the Hindu way of life, a daughter's belongings are sanctified, and accepting them would be worse than death. The daughter in this case threatens to commit suicide if the father did not take her ornaments to the moneylender. The climax of the story is that the hard-hearted moneylender is moved by the conditions which have forced the peasant to take his daughter's ornaments, and lends him the money without the customary security of ornaments.

*Do Bhai* shows what jealousy and mutual indifference between two brothers can lead to.

*Panchayat*\* highlights the prestige enjoyed by the traditional village council of five, "the voice of God." The story is woven round Jumman Sheikh and Alagu Chaudhury, two close friends from childhood days. When Alagu is made *sarpanch* to deliver the judgment on Jumman Sheikh's aunt's complaint that the Sheikh had misappropriated her property on false assurances, Alagu forgets his friendship and gives the judgement that is just, namely, against the Sheikh and in his aunt's favour. The Sheikh, who nurses revenge, gets his chance when Alagu is arraigned against Samjhu, the moneylender, who buys Alagu's bullock and overworks it to death, and Jumman Sheikh is made the *sarpanch*. Keen to take his revenge, Jumman, once on the seat of justice, is unable to give a wrong verdict. The two friends are reunited, the wall between them crumbles down.

*Sar-i-Pur-Ghurur* idolises a stubborn Thakur who is proud and bends to none except a sadhu who, thanks to his attainments in the realm of intellectualism, is indeed lucky that even the proudest have to bow their heads to him.

\*When this story was being published in the *Saraswati*, editor Mahavir Prasad Dwivedi changed the name to *Pancha Parameshwar*.

*Jugnu ki Chamak* is built round the times following the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh and the consequent collapse of the edifice of his empire. Ranjit Singh's son, Duleep Singh, is exiled in England. Rani Chandra Kunwari, imprisoned in the Chunar fort, puts on the clothes of a beggar woman, eludes the sentries and escapes from her imprisonment. She meets a Nepal chief who offers her asylum in Nepal should she agree to go there. But Nepal had sided with Lord Dalhousie in his fight against Punjab. She, therefore, hesitates to go to Nepal. Told that the opposition to her was when she wielded power, and that Nepal would certainly give her asylum now, she agrees and goes to Nepal. The question of asylum is discussed in the assembly. Members are afraid lest this should alienate Nepal's friendship with Britain. But the Rana explains to the august assembly that political asylum has been the traditional custom of Nepal and that she would stay there not as a conspirator engaged in political activities but as a political refugee. The assembly constructs a palace for her and gives her a monthly pension of ten thousand rupees. The Political Resident's report of the asylum granted to the "rebel" does not worsen the relations between Nepal and Britain, because Britain is convinced that Rana Jung Bahadur is a trusted ally. The political asylum given to the Rani, according to the writer of the story, is like the light of a glow worm in a pitch dark night.

*Neki ki Saza* portrays the vicious system under which engineers accept commission—another name for bribe—from contractors. It shows how difficult it is for an honest engineer to maintain his integrity. While a prospective son-in-law's father demands a high price for accepting the daughter of an engineer, the contractors resent his insistence on correct specifications and get him transferred by his superior officer who accepts the usual commission and decides against him on the basis of false reports by contractors and his own subordinates who have not been "looked after" by the engineer. The sudden transfer and demotion are only in response to complaints, and are in effect a penalty for his not accepting bribes.

*Pareeksha* touches a theme of how to select a good officer, in this case the Dewan of a state. When a Dewan, with distinguished service, decides to retire, his chief accepts his resignation on the condition that he should himself select his successor. The

Dewan advertises the post and calls a large number of candidates for a group test lasting about a month. Before the final selection, he dresses himself as a peasant whose food-laden cart is stuck in the mud and slush on the steep banks of the river. The scene of his difficulty is close to the ground where the candidates are playing a game of hockey. While all others turn their eyes away from the peasant, one who has been slightly injured in the game goes to him and helps him push the cart out of the mud. Because of his sympathy, self-confidence and large-heartedness, he is given the job. Such a one, it is announced at the court, may commit a mistake, but could never stray from the path of *dharma*, or duty and piety.

Premchand's stories had gained so extensive a popularity that apart from *Zamana*, they were now being readily published in other Hindi journals, particularly the *Sarsawati* of Allahabad and *Pratap* of Kanpur. "I am trying to acquire fluency in Hindi these days," he told Nigam.

We find Premchand sending the same short story simultaneously to the Urdu and to the Hindi journals. The translations at times were done indifferently by his favourite pupils who considered an assignment of this nature to be a matter of pride and also a qualification for getting to know the secret of writing short stories, and were touched up by Premchand.

Requests for and appreciations of his writings from the Hindi newspapers and periodicals outstripped those from the Urdu journals. He was led to believe that he had brighter prospects in the realm of Hindi letters than in Urdu. He told Nigam: "I think writing in Urdu won't do. Like the late Balmukand Gupta, I shall have to pass the last days of my life in writing Hindi. Is there a Hindu who has distinguished himself in Urdu? And if none has succeeded, how can I?"

Premchand's literary activities after his transfer to Gorakhpur, gravitated towards Hindi. Within a year or so, we find him publishing *Sapta Saroj* and *Nava Nidhi*, and his first major novel *Sevasadan*.

## At Gorakhpur

WHEN PREMCHAND WAS transferred on promotion—in August 1916—to become the Assistant Master at the Normal High School, Gorakhpur, Mrs. Premchand was in the final stages of pregnancy. The family left Basti by train on August 18 and arrived at Gorakhpur the same evening. School teachers and pupils had had prior intimation and he was, therefore, accorded a warm reception.

The house which Premchand was to occupy had not yet been vacated. The family had, therefore, to be lodged in the school premises itself. While Premchand talked to the school teachers and pupils, Mrs. Premchand was in labour. One of the teachers moved her to his own house, and there, at ten o'clock the same night, she delivered a son who was named Sripat Rai, nicknamed "Dhunnu" (Premchand was now thirty-six years old). The occasion was naturally celebrated by festivities in accordance with the then prevailing tradition.

One of the retired peons of the school told this writer that Premchand was the kindest soul he had ever met, that he was never conscious of his position and was invariably kind to the poor people. He would talk to the grass-cutters and feel at one with them. He would always help the poor financially and never ask them for the money.

Although the hostel mates and peons would willingly oblige, Premchand would never ask them to do any odd jobs for him; he would himself sweep the compound of his house and wash his own clothes.

Premchand was as popular among his colleagues as among his students. Some of the latter have narrated their reminiscences with a considerable degree of feeling. He seldom showed any interest in games, we are told, and devoted most of his spare time to reading and writing. His life was disciplined. His daily routine, according to one, was to get up before four o'clock, do



his ablutions, go out for a walk, return, have tea, read the newspaper and get down to writing which he would leave shortly before ten when he would go to the school. After his return from school, he would again get down to writing, and this would continue till 10 o'clock at night.

His dress was simple and of khadi. He would wear a shirt and a *dhoti* at the house, and change over to pants, shirt and coat while going to school. Some times he would be bareheaded, and at others put on a cap. Once when he failed in the B.A. examination he took a vow that he would not wear a cap till he passed the examination. This pledge having been taken, when a headgear was necessary during the inspection, he would put on a turban, but not a cap.

According to one pupil, he was conscientious and would himself take an evening round of the four blocks of the school hostel to see that the students were present. When the school bell rang, wrote one of his pupils, Premchand would emerge from his house dressed in dhoti and an unbuttoned coat, his head bare and his hair dishevelled. He looked the very "picture of a poet or a philosopher."

According to another, however, he could be selfish in regard to the time he devoted to the students. This attitude of his once precipitated a strike. If told of his lapse, however, he would be remorseful also. He seldom used the blackboard.

Premchand taught history and geography to the post-middle and training classes. He would start by reading from the textbook, "finish in 15 minutes for which other teachers would have taken an hour" and then start his "real lecture," enriched by his vast reading. He would quote from authorities and tell the pupils how and why the textbooks had been written in a biased manner with the sole purpose of demoralising the people and bringing about a cleavage between the different sections of the Indian nation, in particular the Hindus and Muslims. There would be questions for elucidation, and he would reply to all points raised, or those which occurred to him. His history period, we are told, was a period of discovery.

Before the period ended, he would tell the pupils: "What I have told you is only to enable you to understand the true facts. When you answer the question paper in the examination, please say only what is written in the book; otherwise, you would fail."

It is characteristic of Premchand that not only was laughter not tabooed in the class-room, but also that it was welcome. That owing to these and other traits, he was a darling of the pupils is shown by the fact that those living in the hostel next door to his (official) residence were always at his beck and call. Munshi Manzurul Huq Kalim, who has given us a part of the above account, has also told us that wishing to take advantage of his popularity with the teacher, he was keen to learn the art of writing, and in fact wrote out a novel and gave it to Premchand for his opinion. Kalim got it back the next day with the comment that he had little time to spare for longish things and that he would certainly go through short stories. The pupil did write a few stories which, through Premchand's recommendation, got into print in *Zamana*. Incidentally, he also tells us that he was the person who made fair copies of most of Premchand's short stories written at Gorakhpur from August 1916 to May 1918.

Premchand's popularity with his pupils, colleagues and the Headmaster, Babu Bechanlal, was, however, in sharp contrast with the stubbornness he could exhibit to senior-most officials and to his superiors. Once his milch cow entered the District Collector's compound. The Collector was furious. He threatened to shoot down the cow and sent for the owner through his peon. Before, however, the message reached Premchand, nearly 200 persons had assembled opposite the Collector's house to meet his challenge to shoot down a cow, and they informed Premchand that they were ready to deal with the situation.

"If the Collector really wanted to shoot down the cow," he asked them. "why should he have called me? Isn't it childish to shoot it down before my own eyes."

The crowd was not convinced. They apprehended the worst. "We won't leave here without getting the cow back," said the crowd.

"And what would you do should he really shoot it down?" he asked.

"There would be bloodshed."

"But the army people regularly kill cows and calves," said Premchand. "Why do you keep quiet then?"

And he went into the Collector's house.

"You sent for me?" he asked.

"Your cow entered my compound, said the Collector, "and I would shoot it down."

"You could have shot it down if you wanted. But why call me to witness it?"

"I am an Englishman, you know. And I am the Collector. I have all the powers to shoot it down."

"You are an Englishman, yes. You are the Collector, yes. But there is such a thing as public opinion."

"I'll leave it today. Next time, when it enters my compound I'll shoot it down."

"If you do decide to shoot it down, please don't think of calling me." And saying this, Premchand came out of the Collector's house.

Another instance relates to the argument with the Collector of Gorakhpur. Back home after the school hours one day, Premchand was relaxing and was reading the newspaper when the Collector on horseback passed in front of Premchand's house. While he expected that Premchand would get up and *salaam* him, the latter did not care even to get up. The Collector was annoyed. A little way ahead he stopped and sent for Premchand through his pcon.

"Yes?" asked Premchand.

"You are very haughty," said the Collector. "You don't even care to salute your boss when he passes in front of your house."

"I am a subordinate so long as I am in the school," retorted Premchand. "At my house afterwards I am the lord. And your behaviour, I think, is far from correct. I am entitled to sue you for defamation."

It was with great difficulty that he was restrained from suing the Collector. This incident was possibly the repetition of an encounter which he had with an Inspector of Schools earlier.

At home, Premchand was a devoted husband and a loving father. And yet there was little peace in the house. The stepmother still created problems. When the family of Premchand's uncle came to Gorakhpur to escape the epidemic of plague in the village, the stepmother created a furore, and Premchand put them up only after annoying her. She would also hide a portion of the limited supply of milk for her own son. According to Mrs. Premchand, even the infant Dhunnu got nothing out of the one and a half litres taken daily from the milkman for the

family. Sago for him had to be cooked in water and as a result the child too got dysentery.

The stepmother was also of little help generally to any member of Premchand's family. While there was sickness in the family, she decided to go back to the village and wanted that her son be summoned telegraphically. Premchand, who was short of money, sent her to the village along with someone else. A few days later, however, while the sick Mrs. Premchand was getting ready to go to her brother's house at Allahabad for treatment, the stepmother announced by telegram her proposed arrival. She did not like Lamhi, she said. It was with great difficulty that she was dissuaded from coming.

The family went to Allahabad. It was summer vacation then. While Premchand stayed in Allahabad for a fortnight for treatment and later went to Kanpur, his family went to his father-in-law's village. Mrs. Premchand's and Dhunnu's health improved. Premchand, however, returned to Allahabad again, got treatment for another fortnight, and then went to Kanpur.

A fortnight before the opening of the school after vacation, he asked for the family to be sent and spoke of his own illness. Although his father-in-law had earlier thought that improvement in his daughter's health would demand the continuance of her stay for some more time, he now agreed. The family returned to Gorakhpur. Premchand's financial condition had improved.

The coming of Dhunnu had synchronised with a rise of ten rupees in Premchand's salary, to sixty rupees a month. In February 1917, i.e. within a year, Premchand was also sent to get training in first aid and hygiene at Allahabad for a month and, when he returned, he had another increment of ten rupees.

The Headmaster, Babu Bechanlal, was fond of Premchand. A year or so later, he appointed him as the superintendent of the school hostel, augmenting his income by another fifteen rupees in addition to a rent-free house adjacent to the hostel.

A sum of rupees twenty-five was now sent for the education of Mahtab Rai, his stepbrother, and the remaining forty-five rupees spent on the family, including the stepmother. When, early in 1917, Mahtab Rai who, having twice failed in the S.L.C. examination, had gone up for training in typing at Lucknow and completed the course to take up a job in the Settlement Department at Basti on thirty-five rupees a month, Premchand felt a

little relieved financially. The sum of twenty-five rupees that till now had been sent to Mahtab Rai, was now being saved. But this did not continue for long, for Mahtab Rai was retrenched within a year and Premchand had to seek other avenues for him. As we shall see later, he got him fixed up in the printing press of Mahavir Prasad Poddar at Calcutta. And it was about this time that he had him married also. These further added to Premchand's burdens, and we find him making all attempts to make a little extra money. He bought tickets for the lottery with all the hopes, and prayed to God to have mercy on him. "The lottery has let me down again," he told Nigam. "I was sorry. With what hope should one pray to Him?"

The lottery ticket, it seems, was bought along with Nigam. It may also be that the purchase was in partnership with him. "But for the regret about the lottery, I hope, everything at your end would be normal." Later, he wove out an interesting short story round the theme of doubts arising in the minds of two parties about each other's *bona fides* and how people pray to God for being favoured by him. The story which is entitled *Lottery*, caricatures the whole system.

*Marz-i-Mubarak* is the story where a self-made man is extremely sceptical of the new-fangled ideas of his son who has distinguished himself at college, having gone in for education much against the father's wishes. There is tension between the father and the son. During the father's illness, the son takes over the works and implements his ideas. He becomes an ideal employer and a successful businessman who buys new machinery, expands his work through publicity. The old man, when told all about it, refuses to believe what he hears, and when he does see it during a surprise visit to the mill, he is happy beyond measure, feels remorseful at his having earlier run down the son and ascribes all the change for the good to his illness.

His *Ithoka* in some ways, however, has the same theme as *Silai-i-Maatam* and *Tiriya Charitra*. Rajkumari Prabha is to be married to the enlightened Raja Hari Chand of Naugarh, who has been educated at the Mayo College, Ajmer. Before, however, the wedding takes place, she is impressed by a *sadhu*, a singer, who is passing that way, and invites him inside the palace. She is so deeply impressed by the *sadhu* that her happiness at her marriage is diluted. The Raja is, in fact, a great lover of arts and

music and one day takes her round his auditorium where she sees pictures of great writers, painters, scholars and warriors (the list, with comments, is an indication of Premchand's interests at that time). One of the pictures is that of the Raja himself, as a sadhu! To Prabha the secret is now revealed. The sadhu of her image was none other than the Raja who had appeared incognito before her. To her, therefore, the lover and the husband are now the same.

*Rajput ki Beti* is taken from Rajput history. Rajkumari Prabha, who is to be married to the Rajkumar of Mandar, is kidnapped by the Rana of Chittor. She agrees to go with the Rana because, as she herself says, her refusal would have meant shedding the blood of those dear to her. But she is indignant and does not yield to the entreaties of the Rana. Having been disgraced and thinking that to the people she was the wife of the Rana of Chittor, she is now unwilling to go back either to her father or to the Rajkumar of Mandar. When, one night, the Rajkumar of Mandar is able to smuggle himself into the Rana's palace and asks her to accompany him, Prabha refuses point-blank. The Rana also appears and there is a fight. Rana's blow strikes Prabha who tries to intervene, and the Rajkumar kills himself. The two die and the blood from their bodies mingles—a tribute to true love and the fidelity of Rajput women!

*Shola-i-Husn* is an eerie story woven round the life of a nymphomaniac who destroys many lives. It is with extreme difficulty that the hero of the story is able to extricate himself.

*Saut* shows the sacrifice that an Indian wife can make for the happiness of her husband. Godavari, who has no issue, persuades the husband to marry again, and in effect arranges a second marriage for him. After some time, however, she finds a change in the husband, poisoned by the new arrival in the home. The management of the household also passes on to the second wife who, to the annoyance of Godavari, is extravagant. Godavari's life becomes unbearable and, for the sake of peace in her husband's home, she drowns herself.

*Mashal-i-Hadayat* portrays the horrible conditions of the Indian villages, on the one hand, and the hypocrisy of the so-called reformers and political leaders who are out of touch with the realities of the village life, on the other. The hero is remorseful at the exploitation of the poor and his own hypocrisy, for, in a

moment of crisis he runs away to his estate. The character of rustic Baburam appears to be after Premchand's heart. Ridiculed by the "uppish" people, he is an idealist and shows how to do good by the people and become their friend, philosopher and guide.

In one of his letters, Premchand himself says that the story has no plot, and that it is a "caricature of the times we live in."

*Bang-e-Sahar* is built round the theme of a change of heart, in this case in the good-for-nothing, third son of a village elder. The son who is happy-go-lucky, is ridiculed by the people of the village and his own family, including his wife, for whom he does nothing. One day, when his son who, denied delicacies being brought for other cousins, weeps and is being beaten by the mother, the father is touched. He feels remorseful and assures the wife that from the next day he would be a changed man and that he would work and win the esteem of everybody. The son's lot had been an alarm bell to him.

*Durga ka Mandir* is woven round the find by an employee at the High Court of a packet of eight gold sovereigns. The finder, Baij Nath, is torn between his desire to keep the packet and the advisability of depositing it in the police station as lost property. Before he can follow the latter course, a friend borrows two sovereigns for a day and secretly proceeds on three months' leave. In the meantime, Baij Nath falls sick and he and, particularly, his wife feel that medicines had had no effect because the goddess Durga was annoyed with them for not returning the packet of sovereigns to the owner. To seek pardon, Baij Nath's wife goes to the temple of Durga where she meets an old woman who is praying to the goddess to destroy the home of the one who has eaten up her life's savings. Baij Nath's wife takes out the remaining sovereigns, sells her ear-rings to buy another two sovereigns to make good those loaned to her husband's friend, and returns the whole lot to the old woman.

*Eaman ka Faisla* which is somewhat in the vein of *Namak ka Darogha*, is woven round the theme of a Brahmin zamindar's employee turning dishonest after a long service following the death of the master. When he tells the employer's widow in an oblique manner that the villages transferred to his name, initially to overcome a legal difficulty, were his own and that at worst he had to pay the amount due to her, she is furious and turns

him out before he can tamper with the records. His own mother and wife are against his swallowing up the property. The employee steals the records at night and consigns them to the Ganga. The zamindar's widow sues him, but there is little documentary evidence in favour of the widow and she loses the case. Then she asks him, in the court itself, as to whose really was the property. Remorseful, the former employee tells the truth. Says the judge: "This judgement is according to the moral law, not just according to law." The agent is re-employed by the widow.

It may be mentioned here that Premchand by now had acquired some fluency in Hindi. Different versions in Urdu and Hindi of the same stories were now being published in journals in the two languages simultaneously. The welcome extended to him by the Hindi journals, particularly *Saraswati* of Allahabad, was much beyond his expectation. Encouragement also came from Mahavir Prasad Poddar, a Hindi litterateur of Gorakhpur, who had just started a publishing house known as the Hindi Pustak Agency. While Premchand's first collection of Hindi short stories, *Sapta Saroj* was published in June 1917 by the Hindi Pustak Agency, Gorakhpur, Premchand's book of stories appears to have been among the first few publications of the Agency which later had its head office in Calcutta.

*Sapta Saroj*\* announced to the Hindi world of letters the emergence of a remarkable writer of short stories, till now known to a circle of magazine readers only. The book took the literary circles by storm and was widely welcomed. Acclaimed *Saraswati's* reviewer: "Till now Premchand had devoted himself to the service of literature through Urdu for his literary creations. It is only recently that he has adopted Hindi. Three of his stories (out of the seven in this volume) have been published in this journal. His language is simple and idiomatic, and his style conversational.... There is a naturalness in his stories which combines the moral approach with entertainment."

The enthusiastic reception accorded to *Sapta Saroj* led to the publication, within a few months, of another collection entitled *Nav Nidhi* by the Hindi Granth Ratnakar, Bombay. The stories in this collection, however, were not written after those published in *Sapta Saroj*, but had been written earlier. This fact

\*The collection had a foreword by Mannan Dwivedi Gajpuri.



is important to remember; for, some eminent Hindi critics who had little familiarity with Urdu, or who cared little to ascertain the chronology of these stories, have committed the error of believing that they represented the second phase of Premchand's stories. The stories were nevertheless welcome. According to *Saraswati's* reviewer: "From the point of view of language, as also the thought content, these stories are unique. There is nothing like them even in the more developed languages such as Bengali."

It is also interesting to note that he worked to cash in on his popularity in Hindi for bridging the gulf between the Hindus and Muslims by writing in Hindi about Urdu subjects which had not been touched upon so far. Thus, while he was writing in *Zamana* about the literary treasures in Sanskrit and Hindi, he introduced Sheikh Saadi, the famous Persian writer, to the Hindi-reading public through a little booklet of ninety pages, including thirty-four pages devoted to his life sketch and travels, six pages to a general description of his works, twelve pages devoted to his sayings and the rest devoted to the educative and moralistic instructions contained in his famous *Gulistan* and *Bostan*—books which, like any other child of a *Kayastha* family, Premchand must have learnt by heart in his younger days. He thought so high of Saadi that he entitled his book as *Mahatma Sheikh Saadi*. *Saraswati's* reviewer, who lashed out at the inaccuracies in it, however, agreed that "it is a good book. By reading it, one can have an adequate idea of the greatness of Saadi and his poetry."

The renown that he won in the Hindi world of letters did not mean severance of his connection with Urdu. Far from that. The appearance of new journals, e.g. Imtiaz Ali Taj's *Kahkashan* from Lahore and Brij Narain Chakbast's *Subh-e-Ummid* from Lucknow, which started in 1918, meant increased demands for his stories in Urdu. It also meant offers of higher remuneration.\* Premchand told Nigam: "*Kahkashan* and *Subh-e-Ummid* pay me fifteen rupees for every story. For the very short ones I accept even ten rupees."

\*The highest payment, incidentally, seems to have been made by Maulana Mohammed Ali for the stories published in *Hamdard*, namely, a gold sovereign, neatly packed and sent by registered post to Premchand for each short story.

He told the editor of *Kahkashan*: "*Subh-e-Ummid* has been asking me repeatedly for stories and has been offering me Rs. 15 to Rs. 20 for each. I have now at last accepted their offer. On what pretext could I refuse? As you know, until now I have never written even a single line for that journal. I confide all this in you because we are kindred souls. This does not mean that I am demanding Rs. 15 per story from you; for I am still agreeable to place the stories with you under the old terms. If, however, you see my stories in *Subh-e-Ummid*, and I delay sending stories to *Kahkashan*, please excuse me." Also: "So far I have been getting Rs. 12 per story from you. Even now I do not hesitate to accept the same. As certain journals are ready to offer me better terms, I am afraid, my greed may make me succumb to the temptation. Should it do so, and force me against my wish, please excuse me if I send the better of my stories to them."

Stories like *Bank ka Divala*, *Sauteli Maan*, *Hajj-e-Akbar*, *Zanjir-i-Havas*, were published in the early issues of *Kahkashan*. *Zanjir-i-Havas* shows how the report of a conquering army chief's lust for a captive princess who is to be presented at the Royal Court, is conveyed to the emperor and leads to murder of the chief in the court by the emperor himself. This story, Premchand tells Taj, is not "related to any event in history. Kassim is certainly the name of the conqueror of Sind, and there is also an incident in his life that could have been woven into the story. My story, however, has nothing to do with the character or any incident in his life. In fact, it is with a view to avoiding any misunderstanding that I have not mentioned some of the other names that I could have. The aim of the story is to show how lust makes a man blind and how it gathers strength."

*Bank ka Divala* is woven round the theme of a change of heart in the successor to an estate whose ruler has taken a loan of ten lakhs of rupees from a bank and whose Rani, who has been promptly paying the interest to the bank, suddenly dies. The bank's manager who had given the loan on insufficient security, because he believed that trust begets trust and that real trust is never betrayed, is crestfallen. So are the shareholders. The announcement that the successor, who had litigation against the Rani, would not honour the Rani's commitments, spreads panic and leads to gloom in the city of Lucknow, and also the death of one who, incidentally, was a classfellow of the succes-

sor to the *gadi*. The successor, who wishes to live in style, sees the misery to which his decision not to honour the Rani's commitments, has led to. He decides to live frugally like one of those who are his subjects, and to honour the predecessor's commitments. His brothers get a fixed sum as privy purse, but his mother dies of shock. His wife surprisingly, however, agrees with him in his "renunciation."

*Sauteli Maan* is a story woven round a child who loses his mother. The father, who marries again, tells the stepmother that she has to look after the child just as lovingly as his real mother. While the stepmother is looking after the child with unusual love and affection, the father presumes that the son is being given a stepmotherly treatment. When one day he is told by the son that the reason for his weeping is the apprehension lest she who loves him more than the real mother, should also leave him, the father is moved.

*Hajj-e-Akbar* is the moving story of the attachment of an *ayah* to her ward. The child is also attached to her. The child's mother, however, is distrustful of the *ayah* and turns her out. The child feels lost without the *ayah* to whom he is attached, and falls sick. All treatment is in vain. The father then goes to get the *ayah* back. The *ayah* has just boarded the train for a pilgrimage. Hearing the news of the sickness of the child, she gets down from the train and returns to the child. The child's recovery is remarkably swift. He improves. The *ayah* blames him for preventing her from undertaking the pilgrimage. "This is the greatest pilgrimage of all," says the child's father.

Other stories written about this time include *Rah-i-Khidmat* wherein a devotee learns, after several tribulations and penances, that love is the handmaid of service and that real service can make one truly oblivious of love, esteem and physical comforts.

*Fateh* symbolises the victory of a prince consort whose queen's pride makes her send the husband away in exile. She passes through various vicissitudes, including queer battles where aeroplanes and poison gases are used, but is ultimately reunited with the husband.

*Khanjar-e-Vafa* is woven round the history of the fort of Mandaur. It idolises the love for the motherland and shows how one who is truly patriotic would not shirk even from sacrificing one's only son at the altar of patriotism.

*Khvab-i-Pareesan* is built round the theme of a woman feeling forlorn in the absence of the husband who has gone away to the interior of Bundelkhand for famine relief work. The wife gets ominous dreams and is worried. An astrologer says that the dreams he has been told about portends evil for the man. As there is no letter from the husband for some time she, in her anxiety, leaves to trace her husband. The ominous dreams continue and, frightened, she jumps out of the moving train—within the sight and hearing of her husband—and dies.

## Sevasadan, Prem Purnima, Prem Batisi

PREMCHAND HAD EARNED considerable reputation as a writer of short stories in Hindi as well as Urdu. He now made a hit with a major novel—the first by “Premchand,” his earlier *Jalva-i-Isar* having been published under the name of “Navabrai.” Written in Urdu as *Baazaar-i-Husn* and published first in Hindi, the novel appears to have been started towards the end of 1916, by which time he had read a lot of theosophist literature by Madame Blavatsky, Mrs. Annie Besant, and also such books as *Les Misérables* which had so deeply impressed him that we find him asking Nigam: “Has it been translated into Urdu? . . . If not, I would like to do the translation. It would take about a year.”

Once started, *Baazaar-i-Husn* progressed fast. By January 1917, we find Premchand telling Nigam that “while I started it as a short story, I find now it is assuming the proportions of a novel. In fact, I have already written nearly a hundred pages and am so engrossed in it that I don’t feel like doing anything else.”

The plot, he told Nigam, “is interesting and I feel that this time I would succeed in writing a novel.” Two months later he wrote to Nigam, again from the Training College, Allahabad: “I am lost in writing my novel and can undertake other things only after this is completed.” And again: “My novel is progressing. If I could have a little leisure, I would like to finish it. It is already very long and I am keen to complete it.”

After some time, he told Nigam: “I shall give up writing short stories. The brain cannot hold two plots at the same time, and I can, therefore, undertake only one thing at a time—either the novel or the short stories. As the plot of the former is only one, it is not as difficult as writing two or three stories every month.”

In the novel, which seems to have been completed before the end of 1917, he dealt with the problem of moral degradation symbolised by the “red light street” institutions.

Kishenchand is a conscientious and honest sub-inspector of police. Faced with the requirements of a dowry for his daughter's wedding, he puts his honesty of twenty-five years in cold storage and accepts a bribe which results in his conviction to five years' imprisonment and the expenditure of all his savings on his defence. The sentence is passed at a time when his family has little left for the marriage of his two daughters, Suman and Shanta, both brought up in luxury and unaccustomed to household work. While Kishenchand is in jail, his wife's brother comes to the aid of the family. Through his help, Suman is married to Gajadhar Prasad, a widower clerk earning only fifteen rupees a month—and with little prospects of earning more. Suman's mother weeps on seeing ageing Gajadhar, but is helpless. Suman's marriage to Gajadhar is like the companionship of an "Arab horse with a pack mule." Gajadhar cannot afford to engage servants. Suman has, therefore, to do all the household chores. This is a life she does not relish. Vivacious, ambitious, accustomed to easy living, she feels unhappy and wants her husband to earn more. Somehow or the other, she envies the life of Bholi, a prostitute who lives in the house opposite Suman's. Bholi eats well, dresses well and is honoured by the elite of the town. However, when Bholi attempts to lure Suman, the latter considers it below her dignity even to talk to her. "I may be poor and helpless," she says to herself, "but I keep my honour intact and there is no ban on my entry into the house of a gentleman. None looks down on me. Bholi, on the other hand, may have all the comforts and luxuries, but she is not really respected. She only sits in her room to exhibit her shamefacedness and enjoys the fruits of vulgarity."

Soon, however, Suman comes to know that it is not correct for her to look down upon Bholi. One evening Bholi invites Suman to a function in her house. Suman turns down her invitation. At nine o'clock Gajadhar comes home, dines and goes over to Bholi's. When he returns at midnight, Suman asks her husband the names of those who had visited Bholi's house.

"I don't know all of them," says Gajadhar. "There must be all sorts of people. There were certainly several of the rich of the town."

"But do not all these people consider it below their dignity and position to visit a prostitute's apartment?"

"If they did, why should have they come?"

"But you, I am sure, must have felt embarrassed to go there".

"When so many important and big people are there, why should I feel any embarrassment? The seth for whom I work in the evenings was also there."

"I had thought that people considered prostitutes to be despicable creatures."

"Yes, some people do, but their number is insignificant. Western education has widened the mental horizon of people. Bholi-bai is respected in the town."

The sky was overcast. There was a fine breeze. Gajadhar Prasad was tired, and went off to sleep as soon as he lay down on his bed. But Suman could not sleep. Next day when Suman saw Bholi, she herself addressed her: "There was great festivity at your house last night."

Bholi understood that she had made an impact. "Should I send you some dessert?... It has been prepared by the *halwai*, and a Brahmin has brought it."

"Yes, do please send some," says Suman shyly.

Suman sees that the "pillars of religion" also pay court to her neighbour, Bholi, who is respected and gets full attention from the priests in the temple where Suman is ignored.

Gradually Suman succeeds in getting an opportunity of moving with the elite of the town, cultivates the friendship of a neighbour, Subhadra, the wife of a well-to-do lawyer, Padam Singh. Gajadhar does not approve of his wife's visits to Padam Singh's house and, as she persists in visiting the lawyer's house, Gajadhar entertains doubts about her loyalty to him. So, late one evening, when she returns home from a party held at the lawyer's house to celebrate his election as a municipal councillor, Gajadhar turns her out of the house. The only place where she can go for refuge is the lawyer's house. But she cannot stay there for long because her stay causes a minor scandal.

When she has to leave Subhadra's house, Suman thinks of Bholi as possibly the only refuge. She also thinks of the comfortable life she leads. She goes to Bholi, a shrewd judge of the commercial value of Suman's charms, who welcomes her with open arms. Suman is trained to sing and dance, and is accepted into the sisterhood of the prostitutes. From a distance Suman had felt tempted, but closer association with the red light street

disillusions her. In her mind there is a conflict between what is sin and what is virtue, and she resolves this conflict by deciding not to sell her body and by remaining only a nautch girl. She retains her orthodoxy and cooks her own food. Suman's charms and looks make her the craze of the town; the rich go to her as moths go to the flame. Even Padam Singh's nephew, Sadan Singh, frequents her place and gives her presents. She too is fond of him.

Thanks to the efforts of reformers like Padam Singh, who feels remorseful for having forced Suman to leave his house, and Vithaldas, a widow's home is started in Banaras. As Kanwar Anuradh Singh, who is Premchand's mouthpiece, says: "We have no right to look down upon prostitutes as fallen creatures. It is the height of our own shamefacedness. Day in and day out, we accept bribes, receive interest at exorbitant rates, suck the blood of the poor and cut the throat of the helpless. Surely, we are the most fallen, the greatest sinners, the most evilly disposed and unjust. We who think ourselves to be educated, civilised, cultured, enlightened and 'of the classes,' have no right, no justification whatsoever to look down upon any stratum of society. ... In a society which puts a premium on, and honours and respects the tyrannical landlord, the corrupt official, the cantankerous moneylender, the selfish relatives and friends, Dal Mandi is bound to prosper. And why shouldn't it? How else could the ill-gotten money be spent, save in questionable channels? The day the system of bribes, rich gifts and compound interests, ceases to exist, Dal Mandi would be deserted, these sparrows will fly away. But not till then."

Suman herself has been disillusioned of her profession. "What deception and snare all this has been!" she says. "While from a distance it looked like a flower garden, I now find that it is a wilderness full of blood-thirsty beasts and venomous insects. From a distance it looked like a pretty sheet of silver spread in moonlight; I now find that it is the haunt of cruel beasts, the hunting ground for the sons of the rich." Suman gives up her profession and joins a widow's home.

Meanwhile, Gajadhar realises his mistake. Afraid of public opinion, he dares not take Suman back into his house. He dons the holy robes, takes on the name of Swami Gajanand and moves about in Banaras and the neighbourhood. As an atone-



ment for his sins, he secretly presents Rs. 1,000 to Umanath, Suman's uncle, for the forthcoming wedding of Shanta, his sister-in-law.

Shanta is to be married to Sadan Singh. The marriage party arrives in Shanta's village. It is here that his father, Madan Singh, a zamindar of a nearby village, comes to know of Shanta's relationship to Suman. He breaks off the relationship. The party returns from the village—an insult to the bride.

Kishenchand, who has just returned after completing his sentence, is unable to bear the shock of his elder daughter having been forced to become a prostitute. Despite Gajanand's pleas, he drowns himself in the Ganga.

Shanta considers herself married to Sadan Singh. Her attitude towards life also becomes that of a married woman. Sadan Singh, who is afraid of his father and obeys him, feels remorseful for having damaged Shanta's life. Knowing that his uncle shares his thoughts, he gets emboldened. Back in the city, he sells his gold chain, invests the proceeds in a boat to ferry passengers across the Ganga. He makes good money, builds a cottage on the banks of the river, and stays there.

Suman feels that her ignominy has been the real cause not only of her father's death but also of her sister's misfortunes. Soon afterwards when, thanks to Padam Singh's quiet efforts, she is joined by Shanta in the widow's home and facts about herself are known to the other inmates of the home, they threaten to leave it. Against the threat, Suman herself—and her sister Shanta—leave the home. Sadan Singh who meets them gives them shelter in his cottage. Sadan Singh and Shanta live as husband and wife and get a son. Suman, however, feels ignored in the house (which is no longer visited by the neighbours—also because they do not wish to associate themselves with Suman).

Sadan Singh feels he cannot really allow a woman who was once a prostitute to stay with him, even though she be his sister-in-law. But he cannot tell her to get out. When, however, his parents come to visit him, Suman leaves Shanta's house—for the wilderness. She treks through a dense forest and does not know where she is. Her feet are sore. Out of sheer exhaustion she faints and falls down. She has a reverie and is drawn to a cottage where she meets Swami Gajanand himself. The reunion is moving. She confesses that her desires were

the sole cause of all the misfortunes of the family. She asks him to forgive her. The swami tells her that the true path of virtue is the path of service. He prevails upon Suman to take charge of Sevasadan, a rescue home for the daughters of prostitutes. Such, then, is the story of *Sevasadan*.

Considered by some as Premchand's best work, the novel brings to the fore the evil consequences of a system that breeds a middle class which makes a show of a standard that it is unable to maintain without accepting illegal gratification.

Although the main problem analysed in this novel is the age-old problem of prostitution, there are significant observations on many a problem including the question of lingua franca, educational system, patriotism and Hindu-Muslim unity. There are several close and intimate character studies too. The divergent views of different people on any and every problem are expressed through the city fathers. There are vociferous people like Padam Singh who is a radical thinker but reels back at the thought of putting his ideas into practice. Later in the book, we find him ashamed of himself for his weakness. He cannot face Suman's gaze and, therefore, dares not go near her. Then there is Madan Singh who insists on having a nautch party on the occasion of Sadan Singh's wedding, for he believes that marriage is incomplete without it and that on it depends his *izzat*. Yet, he opposes Sadan's marriage to Shanta, simply because she is the sister of one who has joined a profession considered ignoble!

However, instead of making us look down on Suman and Bholi with contempt, Premchand arouses in us feelings of pity on their lot and makes us sympathise with them.

The range of his writings, as revealed by this book, had considerably widened since the publication of his *Jalva-i-Isar*. *Sevasadan's* sweep is wider, the theme loftier and the presentation maturer. Critics, it may be mentioned here, have compared it with *Vanity Fair*. Premchand himself admitted that in writing this novel, his reading of *Vanity Fair* had certainly inspired him, but emphasised that he had neither taken the cue from *Vanity Fair*, nor copied it to any extent whatsoever. "The outlines of the two bear resemblance, but the two are of very different types."

The novel, as we have mentioned above, was written originally in Urdu. But its publication posed a difficult problem. "How

about serialising it in *Zamana*," he asked Nigam, and himself replied: "The present size and volume of the journal cannot perhaps bear the burden of carrying the novel."

While Premchand was experiencing difficulty in finding a publisher in Urdu—"they are rare nowadays"—the Hindi publishers were only too willing to oblige. The Hindi Pustak Agency of Calcutta undertook the novel's publication and agreed to pay Rs. 450 or so. Premchand himself visited Calcutta in June 1918 in connection with its publication—and also to make arrangements for his stepbrother, Mahtab Rai. *Sevasadan* appeared before the end of 1918.

The book was taken notice of in *Saraswati's* book column in February 1919 and reviewed favourably in the issue of February 1920. Said the reviewer: "Hindi literature required a blending of Western techniques with the soul of India so that the centuries old traditions and ideas could be changed. Such a blending is seen in Premchand's work *Sevasadan*. Pulsating with patriotism, love for the lingua franca, Hindu-Muslim unity, etc. *Sevasadan* shows that the author has unparalleled experience of different problems of Indian life."

Another reviewer characterised the author among the few "lonely pioneers" who sowed the seeds of literature in their "quiet unknown corners." He hoped that the writer would compose better works so that the time might come when Hindi literature could take pride that it too had "Thackeray, Dickens, Scott, Rabindranath Tagore."

Premchand told Nigam: "You'll be pleased to hear that my Hindi novel has gained much fame, and most Hindi critics have considered it among the best in Hindi." And to Taj: "*Saraswati* has published a criticism. If you could lay your hands on a copy of February issue, please do see it."

The success of this novel, as we shall see later, encouraged him to start his next important novel.

The book's fame attracted translators from other Indian languages. Within a few months, we find that an illustrated edition of the novel was published in Gujarati. The publisher paid Rs. 100 to Premchand. The latter started making a fair copy of the Urdu version. But it was difficult to get a publisher interested. He asked Taj, who edited *Kahkashan* of Lahore, if he could serialise it in his journal but agreed that "until the time *Kah-*

*kashan's* circulation is reasonably high, serialisation would be premature."

While Premchand was busy writing his *Sevasadan* and his next novel, we find that he was doing more and more of translation work. An explanation lay perhaps in the fact that he wished to find diversion from his regular novel-writing. He translated (the Belgian dramatist) Maeterlinck's *Sightless* which was published as a serial entitled *Shab-e-Tar* in *Zamana* towards the end of 1919. The translation was prefaced by a short introductory note. "Nothing more could be written," he says, "because I could not get any more material." He translated an "unusual" story\* by Charles Dickens, which was published under the name of *Ashk-e-Nadaamat* in *Kahkashan* in January 1920. He also translated an interesting story by Oscar Wilde. Nigam, it appears, did not show any willingness to accept it and Premchand sent it to Taj. The title of the story\*\* is not known. We do find, however, that about this time Premchand sent the Urdu translation of the *Ghost of Cantervilles* to Taj and told the latter that his name as a translator might not be mentioned. ("After *Aab-i-Hayat* and *Ashk-e-Nadaamat*, I have taken a vow that I won't translate.")

While Premchand subsequently undertook translation of plays, it appears to be true that he did not translate any short story afterwards and wrote only original ones.

We give below the gist of some of these stories.

*Khoon-i-Huriat* is the story of a woman who, offended by the husband's desertion and attachment to another woman, has an argument with him and his haughty and callous mistress. Ultimately, she finds her way to the red light street. When the husband sees her there, he is disgusted with the whole affair, murders his mistress and commits suicide.

Political atmosphere in the country was then surcharged with communalism. *Tamaddun* read meaning into the story and

\**The Story of Richard Doubledick*. (The author is grateful to the British Council in India for its help in tracing the original story by Charles Dickens.)

\*\*Imtiaz Ali Taj had told the author in 1941 that the translation of Oscar Wilde's story was "so bad" that he rejected it. I was neither returned to Premchand nor destroyed. Taj was not certain of the name of the story but thought that it was *De Profundis*.

commented upon it adversely. Premchand told Taj: "You have seen their narrow-mindedness; where a needle won't go, they'll like to push a girder. I have sent a rejoinder to *Tamaddun*. If they do not publish it, I will send it to *Zamana*."

In *Daftary*, yet another story written about this time, an honest daftary (peon) is deeply attached to a horde of domesticated animals, including horses, dogs, cows, goats and cats. The wife, who is devoted to him, takes interest in these animals. One day, the daftary goes on a *shikar* with his officers. He loses his way and gets stranded. His wife, in the meantime, is bitten by a snake and dies. All the animals leave the house. When the daftary returns, he is grief-stricken. His friends and neighbours sympathise, and persuade him to remarry, this time the daughter of a court peon who exacts money from those who come to meet his boss, the collector. The daftary's new wife is differently constituted. She is harsh of tongue, and a glutton. The daftary finds it difficult to make two ends meet. The domesticated animals are disposed of. He then goes to all and sundry for loans. A stage comes when even his credit-worthiness is doubted. One of his patrons, the narrator, takes pity and gives him five rupees, not as a loan but as a gift. "Those who suffer indignities at home are no less brave than those who fight in the battlefield."

In a letter to Taj, Premchand said that "*Daftary* has been taken from life, and there is very little of imagination in it. . . . With advancing years, I find that my inability to inject the syrup of romance into my stories has become aggravated. The old times are gone."

*Qurbani* is a powerful story which throws in sharp focus the Indian peasant's love for his ancestral piece of land that is taken away by the greedy zamindar. The dispossession of the land leads to his death, of which there is a subtle suggestion, and to his becoming a friendly apparition, of whom those who go to till the lands are afraid.

*Islah* takes up the thread in stories such as *Mashal-i-Hidayat*. Durga, an ill-paid gardener, supplements his extremely meagre income of five rupees a month by selling, on the sly, a part of the produce of his master's orchard. Turned out by his employer, he joins Premshankar, an agricultural expert who has been educated in the U.S.A. He is a socialist and takes in other workers in the orchard as his co-partners. The orchard is now run on

cooperative lines and Durga, the gardener, does not have to steal things to supplement his low income because, as a partner in the venture, he gets enough.

The story, written about the time of the Russian revolution, is interesting from the point of view of echoing new ideas then influencing the people. Premchand, through his mouthpiece, Premshankar, has some caustic things to say about the current social values. He is bitterly critical of the system in which doctors, lawyers, professors and businessmen become greedy and equate time with money.

*Atmaram* appears to be based on a legend current in neighbouring villages. The village goldsmith, Mahadev, is intensely attached to his pet parrot named Atmaram. What in fact has driven him to an obsession about the pet is the indifference and callousness of his sons, their wives and their children. An odd figure, he is the butt of ridicule. One day, the children release his pet parrot which, pursued by Mahadev, takes to wings. The bird is difficult to catch. After a daylong vain effort, Mahadev rests under a tree where the parrot is perched. When he wakes up at the dead of night, he finds some people talking in hushed tones. They are thieves who, afraid of being caught, decamp, leaving a potful of gold mohurs. Mahadev brings the gold mohurs and the parrot which quietly gets back home. He uses the mohurs to pay off what others thought he had cheated them of. He undertakes a pilgrimage and later uses the found wealth to build a temple, a tank and a memorial to the parrot.

*Ibrat* is the story of a primary school teacher who is jealous of the lot of a head constable of police and a tehsil draftsman (petition writer), both living in luxury on the bribes they exact from the people. The teacher curses his profession. During a railway journey, however, he sees that their victims harass and insult the head constable and the draftsman. These are in sharp contrast to the hospitality and honour that one of his pupils gives to the entire party. The teacher gets a new pride in his profession.

*Sacchai ka Uphar* is a glimpse of the life of a village school wherein the naughty children of rich parents damage the garden which is the focus of attention of the teacher. Spotted red-handed by another pupil who does not tell lies, they cajole him and threaten him. The latter, when asked, reveals the names and

the hostile group gives the poor pupil such a thrashing that they think that he is probably dead. They are frightened, and play the truant. Believing in correct behaviour, the honest pupil who recovers, does not lodge a complaint with the teacher. The miscreants do not believe him, and when they find that he has not really lodged a complaint, they become his admirers. It is a conversion of the heart.

*Bodhi Kaki* is also woven round the idea of change of heart. The old aunt, as in *Panchayat*, has transferred her assets to her nephew. The transfer having taken place, the nephew and his wife in particular, become indifferent. The old woman is starved and she gets excited at the mere smell of good food, as for instance, on the occasion of a birthday party in the house. Her nephew and his wife insult the old woman who is impatiently looking forward to being given food! She is thrown into her dingy room and forgotten. When at the dead of night she is found eating the left-overs, the nephew's wife is moved and feels remorseful, and takes a vow to look after the aunt properly. Feeding her when hundreds have been properly fed is nothing, particularly when her husband has earned money through the old aunt's assets.

*Baz Yافت* purports to be the autobiography of a rustic ill-mannered woman whose lawyer-husband wants her to imitate Western ways which, in India of that time, meant resort to social snobbery. The switchover from the Hindi books on religion to English books by Oscar Wilde, as also the make-up, are not to the liking of the mother-in-law. There are scenes. The couple subsequently shifts to a bigger town where the wife becomes "westernised," plays tennis, becomes a clubgoer, and is callous to the feelings of her husband and his comforts. For instance, she is indifferent when the husband is ill. The husband is now disillusioned with the craze for the Western ways and persuades her with difficulty to bid goodbye to the new-fangled ideas of the West and to get back to her old ways—her attachment to the home and religious books. "Books by Oscar Wilde and others, i.e. except those by Emerson, Ruskin and Carlyle, are made a bonfire of."

*Nauk Jhaunk* is a story in the form of a diary kept by a progressive husband, a lawyer, and his at-first-conservative-and-later-ultra-progressive wife. It is the lawyer husband's advocacy

of progressive ideas which inculcate in her a love for equality and justice that transgresses all social restrictions. The degree of equity offends the lawyer-husband. The wife's admiration of and adulation for the husband is on the decline. "What a shame that our greed had made us so selfish that we parade the name of God, and become shamefaced, that we sacrifice truth at the altar of our selfish ends, little realising that it is precisely because of this that the nation's efforts do not succeed."

*Muamma* poses the problem of deciding which of the two attitudes is correct, i.e. the attitude of honest work on the one hand, and the attitude of flattering and bribing the superiors, or becoming dishonest and keeping them amused without doing a jot of work, on the other. It is a caricature of the system under which the honest and devoted suffer and the sycophants and the corrupt prosper.

*Adarsh Virodh* is an echo of the times when Indians nominated to the Viceroy's Executive Council were the butt of criticism by the nationalists. The son of one of the members, who is studying in London, is critical of his father's policies which are anti-national. He is so disgusted with his father's kowtowing to the British, and the criticism that is levelled against his father by the Indian friends that, after a meeting in Caxton Hall in London, he commits suicide.

Some of these stories were published in his third collection of fifteen Hindi short stories entitled *Prem Purnima* and published by the Hindi Pustak Agency of Calcutta, early in 1920.

While Premchand's collections of short stories and novels in Hindi took their place among the best sellers, the position regarding the publication of collections of short stories and of his novel in Urdu had been far from satisfactory. Stocks of *Prem Pachisi* (Volume I), which cost Premchand nearly Rs. 300, lay unsold and none was coming forward to undertake the publication of the second volume.

"Urdu books," he told Taj, "sell very little, and I wonder if this is my experience alone or of others too. Even after four years of the publication of the first volume of *Prem Pachisi*, more than half the edition lies unsold."

Nevertheless, Premchand was keen that the second volume be brought out quickly and was ready to sell the rights of the first edition for fifty rupees! Nigam who published the first, suggested



that this volume be printed at Lucknow instead of Kanpur (of course, at Premchand's cost). And the latter, thinking that the difference in the cost of printing at Lucknow and at Kanpur would perhaps make up for the freight charges, and also that the Zamana Press was delaying the publication inordinately, accepted the proposal; he was keen that the book be brought out at the earliest. In one letter after another, he enquired about the position of the second volume, i.e. whether or not it had been sent to the press.

Delay on the part of Nigam brought the ultimatum. "Is it that you have given up the idea of bringing it out? If so, please send the lithos on to me, so that I may get them printed here — if the lithos are not made use of immediately, they would be of little use."

And then a reminder: "I still have a lot of things to publish, and if I get stuck up at this stage, how long a life must I have? It is necessary, therefore, to get the book out before the summer vacation, and you must expedite its publication."

In June 1917, Nigam had to announce in his journal that "printing of the second volume of *Prem Pachisi* has begun and the volume would be in the hands of the reading public in July." Referring to the place that Premchand's stories had attained, *Zamana* said: "The author's powerful and unusual pen has put into his wonderful stories the ideas of national self-respect, of great moral character and of love for the country. He has given us vivid pictures of love and beauty with all their purity and has portrayed them from absolutely original angles."

Wrote Premchand: "It is good that *Prem Pachisi* has been sent to the press. If the mistakes in the proofs are very few, please have the proofs read at Kanpur. Should, however, the mistakes be too many, you may send the proofs on to me."

The book came out at long last. *Kahkashan* carried an advertisement of the book and also published a review in its July 1919 issue.

It said: "The conclusions of Munshi Premchand's stories are always moralistic. These days when the character of the Indian people has degenerated terribly, for a popular writer to be able to teach his countrymen through the power of his pen is a matter of the deepest satisfaction and good fortune, not only for himself, but also for the country."

The publication of the two volumes of *Prem Pachisi* was not his only headache. Equally important was the problem of organising the sales and Premchand had to keep count of the copies sold by the Zamana Press. "Five to ten copies are sold every month at the railway bookstall at Gorakhpur started by an acquaintance of mine," he told Nigam.

He also had to arrange for their dispatch to other booksellers, or to friends who were prepared to help him organise the sales through advertising in their journals. In March 1917 he had told Nigam from Allahabad: "I have written to Gorakhpur that copies of *Prem Pachisi* (Volume I) should be sent to you. If they haven't yet reached you, I shall look into the matter as soon as I get back there."

Premchand had also to get his "acquaintance" at Gorakhpur sell other publications of the Zamana Press. He told Nigam: "Please send the following books immediately to him and also the accounts indicating the commission. . . . Payment will either be made in cash, or adjusted in my account." He wrote to Taj: "If you want copies of *Prem Pachisi*, please let me know and I'll get them despatched." And to Nigam: "*Kahkashan* wants 100 copies of *Prem Pachisi* which may kindly be sent to them. The packing charges may be debited to my account. Freight charges are to be paid at Lahore. Please instruct the office that packing should be done, keeping in view the rates of freight and the weight. There should be the minimum difference between the weight charged for and the actual weight. For instance, the packets should be either of twenty seers or thirty seers, but not twenty-one seers. This is to ensure that I do not suffer any loss."

To Taj: "Sixty copies of *Prem Pachisi* were sent to you from Banaras. Please confirm that you have got them. You haven't yet acknowledged their receipt; for, if you have, the receipt has not yet reached me."

Meanwhile, there was enough material for another collection of thirty-two Urdu short stories. The problem, however, was to find a publisher. There was a dearth of good publishers in U.P. The Nawalkishore Press had more or less stopped the publication of such books.

Nigam's Zamana Press was overworked and had in any case proved undependable. As there was none other that he could think of, he asked Nigam: "Kindly ask the manager and let

me know the number of formes that *Prem Batisi* would consist of. I am sure you would give me the maximum concession. Lack of interest on your part should not in fact mean monetary loss to me. It is only because of your personal supervision that I wish to get the book printed at Kanpur. The title page will be printed at Calcutta."

Premchand also asked Taj the rates of calligraphy and printing in Lahore. "How much would a book of 32 formes cost me? If printing rates are cheaper in Lahore, I might get *Prem Batisi* published on my own." And later: "If arrangements could be made through you, please let me know. Of the total print order, I shall purchase 500 copies at cost price. The book will be in two volumes totalling 500 pages. The stories have already been published in *Zamana* and other journals. All that remains to be done is just the selection and arrangement of the stories. My sole object in publishing them in a book form is that these stories of mine should not lie buried and lost in the old files of journals."

In his preface to the book, Premchand wrote: "My first collection of short stories, entitled *Prem Pachisi*, was published several years ago. In so far as the contemporary newspapers are concerned, they praised my humble efforts. But there was little impact on those that know. It took the first edition four to five years to be sold out. This reception was not too encouraging, but a writer has to write. I present, therefore, this second collection of short stories entitled *Prem Batisi* to the Urdu reading public. Maybe, this will be talked about more than the first collection, or perhaps lie stocked in the publisher's godown. But I have done my duty. My only ambition now is that another volume of my forty or fifty short stories should be published under the name *Prem Chalisa* or *Prem Pachasa*. This is all that I ask of life, and if I get that I shall be content."

While the first volume of the collection was ultimately placed with the *Zamana* Press, the second volume was given to Taj's Darul Ashayat. "Some of the stories have already been published in your two journals," he told Taj, and "I'll add another ten. It would be a book of some ten formes."

In regard to terms for *Prem Batisi*, we find him telling Taj "in confidence" that he had been offered 14 per cent royalty on this as also on his earlier collections. ("MacMillans give 20 per cent to Rabindranath Tagore. I know I am not Tagore and I

ask for royalty at rates somewhere between twelve and twenty per cent, i.e. fifteen per cent.”)

Before, however, the agreement on terms (at Rs. 100) was reached, calligraphy and printing was started. The rates of paper went up. “The publication would entail losses, and may mean ruination. We’ll therefore be forced to give up the idea of quality production.”

He arranged for printing paper from Calcutta. And when the second volume was printed in August 1920, Premchand told Taj: “The delay in publication of *Prem Batisi* (Volume I) is owing to the indifference of Daya Narain Nigam. The publication of the second volume (by you) would be a reminder to him. And that’s what I wanted. I am fed up with the delay caused by the Zamana Press.”

Within a month he wrote: “I am still waiting for *Prem Batisi* (Volume I) and won’t allow the Zamana Press to rest.” It came out in December 1920, and the printing was so bad that he wrote to Nigam that he “wept.”

“If I get out of my commitment (with the Zamana Press) this time,” he wrote, “I won’t make any other commitment to them.” And he was serious. “All the copies of the two volumes of *Prem Pachisi* have now been sold out. There may, however, be a few copies of the second volume left. The manager of the Zamana Press is insistent on a reprint, but I have decided not to be caught up in the mesh of *Zamana*. If you could bring it out, I shall be very happy indeed.”

“Have you sent *Prem Batisi* for review?” he asked of Taj. “Will it be possible for the Punjab Textbook Committee to approve it? No? In that case, I think, we should leave it to public’s appreciation.” The sale of 100 books within a short period was considered “not a bad beginning.” Premchand now hoped that his share of 500 copies would also be sold by Taj.

“If due to your efforts, some of my 500 copies of *Prem Batisi* (Volume II) are sold out, it would be wonderful. I know how it is with *Zamana*. Only about 100 to 150 were sold in one year. And I don’t wish to insert advertisement anywhere else this time. I’ll, of course, send some copies to *Subh-e-Ummid*.”

He asked the Zamana Press, Kanpur, to send 600 copies of *Prem Batisi* (Volume I) to Taj at Lahore. “The books were packed in a wooden box, but when the parcel was sent to the railway

station, it was found that goods trains were not running. That's why only 100 copies were sent by the passenger train. As soon as the goods trains restart, the remaining 500 would be dispatched within this month." And he added: "You also send them 100 copies by rail parcel (to Nigam). If a goods train is available, then send 400 copies, so that freight charges are not high." Within a month he wrote again: "You do not seem to have sent *Prem Batisi* (Volume II) to Kanpur where orders for supply are held up. Please do not delay the dispatch any more. If it is not possible to send the copies by goods train, please send only one hundred copies for the time being."

*Baazaar-i-Husn*, the Urdu version of *Sevasadan*, was also hanging fire. Nigam would not handle its publication. But Taj thought differently.

"What you say (about *Baazaar-i-Husn*)," Premchand told Taj, "is encouraging. I shall indeed be grateful if you could send me your detailed criticism. I won't take offence. Why should I? Where are the critics? In fact, I genuinely desire that someone should show me my strong and weak points."

Later: "If you could undertake the publication of such a longish book, I'll start making a fair copy. Otherwise, I'll postpone it till the summer vacation. While making it fair, sometimes scenes after scenes are changed completely. I do not, therefore, like to bother you for getting a fair copy made."

There was one impediment or another in the way of making a fair copy of the *Baazaar-i-Husn*. For instance, he was busy with his preparation for the B.A. examination (in April 1919). "I devoted two months to my B.A. examination. The effort has been successful. For another two months, I have been wandering here and there. It is exactly after four months that I have taken up the pen. I hesitate making any promise regarding *Baazaar-i-Husn*." Later: "It is being faired gradually. I propose now to engage a copywriter so that it is finished soon."

It was April 1920, by the time it was ready and packed. "The post office is closed today. It would, therefore, be dispatched tomorrow by registered post. Kindly glance through it, and let me have your opinion." Taj wrote back that he was suited only for novels and that he should give up writing short stories and restrict himself to articles and novels. He proposed publishing *Baazaar-i-Husn* in two parts. And Premchand agreed.

The calligraphy of *Baazaar-i-Husn* was nearing completion in October 1920. A portion of (the heroine) Shanta's letter was left out through oversight. "You have indeed been vigilant," he wrote to Taj, "I give below the missing portion."

In regard to royalties, he did not expect from the Urdu edition as much as from Hindi, i.e. Rs. 450. "I won't hesitate accepting twelve annas per page of 21 lines."

Later: "You kindly pay me twenty per cent royalty for the first edition. This would mean 240 copies, of the total 1200 copies priced at 1/4/-. After deducting the commission that I'll have to pay to other booksellers or to *Zamana*, you pay me cash for these copies, or give me these copies and I shall myself make arrangement for their sale. If these two propositions are unacceptable to you, please pay me Rs. 250 for the first edition. And if none of these conditions meet with your approval, please publish the book—I think it is demeaning for me to beg of the publishers to publish my own book—and pay me whatever you wish to. And I'll be grateful."

This was his first voluminous novel and he was keen not so much on terms as on the fact that it should be published.

When Taj asked for permanent copyright, Premchand said he had no objection. "But I know the Urdu public and permanent copyright here means at the most three editions, and that too in ten years or more. Knowing all this, I cannot naturally suggest terms that would be unreasonable. I think you should pay me twenty per cent royalty on the first edition and ten per cent for the next two editions. In all, I shall get Rs. 350. In indicating this figure, I can assure you that I have taken all the factors into consideration, and I hope that you won't take me amiss." The agreement was struck at Rs. 250.

"Please don't bother about the payment. I am in no desperate need. If you send it by August, it should be all right."

Premchand was also keen to republish his *Soz-i-Vatan* (by Navabrai) under his new pen-name. We find him asking Nigam to send him a copy of the book, as "there is not a single copy here." He then placed these stories, as also *Sair-i-Dervish*, with Imtiaz Ali Taj for publication. "What have you decided about it?" he asked Taj. Three months later he told Taj: "I don't have another copy of *Sair-i-Dervish* or *Prem Pachisi*. The proofs will have to be checked with the pages. The calligraphist has joined

the paragraphs. I don't think the mistakes are too many. The two books should be on the same format as *Baazaar-i-Husn*. Kindly start the calligraphy."

He was also faced with the problem of the publication of the second edition of *Prem Pachisi*, and told Taj: "You will have to undertake the publication of *Prem Pachisi* also. If in the meantime my own printing press is set up, it may be printed there. So far as I know, however, my brother won't like litho work, because it is easier to handle type. Calligraphists have made the litho work very difficult."

## A Kindred Soul

PROXIMITY OF RELATIONS between the author and the publisher was characteristic of the times in which Premchand lived. We have already seen the close friendship that existed between Premchand and Daya Narain Nigam, Editor of *Zamana* and proprietor of the Zamana Publications. Personal relations were also established with the editor of *Kalkashan* and *Phul*, Imtiaz Ali Taj, the son of the proprietor of Darul Ashayat of Lahore, which published some of his books. Premchand's letters to Taj throw light on the problems that faced the writers and publishers of those times. These letters also echo Premchand's own frustrations.

Premchand claimed a kinship of the soul with Taj. "Your letters reflect so much of friendliness," he wrote. "I desperately wish to meet you. This enslavement, government service, and the fear of a long journey, however, dampen my ardour."

In the summer of 1920, Taj invited Premchand to accompany him to Mussoorie. After having invited him, it seems, Taj forgot about it and Premchand had to remind: "I am ready to come. Please decide soon. If you disappoint me, I may have to go alone." And he did go to Dehra Dun alone.

From the rest house at Dehra Dun, he wrote: "I reached here after stopping at Hardwar and Kankhal. I sent you a letter from Kankhal, but don't know whether you have received it or not. If you are planning to visit here, please intimate me by telegram—of course an ordinary one—so that I might await you here. If you do not propose coming here, I shall leave very soon. . . . While I had hoped that the climate of these places would do me good, I find that, in my case, it had had the opposite effect. During the journey, my condition has become worse, and dysentery, my old enemy, has made my life unbearable. . . . If you do not propose coming here, let's meet in Delhi. But do please inform me when and where I could meet you."



The meeting did not then come about (and had to wait some dozen years). Before, however, Taj reached Dehra Dun, Premchand had left. The latter, in fact, received the intimation through a registered letter delivered to him at the *Zamana* office at Kanpur. "I am sorry," wrote back Premchand. "Had I received your letter at Dehra Dun, I would have visited Mussoorie in your company. During my holiday, I felt that I cannot travel without the company of some friend or relation. I am leaving Kanpur for Gorakhpur today and am going to get treatment for dysentery regularly."

The thread of kinship of the soul is taken up again. "From your imaginary description of me, my looks, etc. I am confirmed in my belief in the relationship of our two souls. Your guess is right, I am forty years of age, and I put on pyjamas, a buttoned-up coat, and a turban. As the usual headgear of an eastern U.P. man is a cap, I am wondering how you could imagine that I put on a turban? Although it is against my conviction, I am sending you herewith a photograph of mine. You kindly return it to me after having seen it. Should you, however, wish a copy of it as a remembrance, 'please get an artist to make a bust from it.'"

A little later Premchand told Taj: "I have very few friends, and you are a member of this very limited group. It is regrettable, therefore, that I haven't met you yet. Shall we two never meet? At least send me a photograph of yours."

And when he got Taj's picture, he wrote to him that "your picture has only deepened my desire to meet you. My mental picture of you was somewhat different. Had I been an artist, I think I would have drawn your picture as a symbol of poetry, art and literature."

"Without any hesitation I can say that there is no other journal in Urdu which is half as interesting as *Kahkashan*," Premchand wrote once. "If, however, the public does not appreciate it, one is helpless."

Once there was a proposal of Taj going to U.K. Taj was apparently in two minds. Premchand's letters to him speak about himself too. He said: "It is very unfair to your own self, as also to the nation, not to avail of this chance. When these years of youthful ambition are past, you, like myself, would regret it. Had I passed my M.A. in my early years, my plight would not

have been as helpless as it now is. I devoted my early years to the writing of short stories, and my wordly needs are now forcing me to take a degree. In my opinion, you should take your B.A. degree from Punjab (University), and thereafter undertake a journey to England. In two or three years' time, you would be qualified to earn five to six hundred (rupees)," for, "on your return from abroad, you could become a professor or principal of some college. It would mean only two years of exile." If, however, "you get drawn to journalism, you could bring out a first-rate English journal. The moral and intellectual advantages that would accrue cannot be easily assessed." Further, "if finances permit, a bright young man like you should try your luck."

Writing in another context: "That you wish to extend your publication business, is a matter of deep satisfaction to me. While there are many journals in Urdu—perhaps too many, because the Muslims are a literary class, and every educated person thinks himself to be a prospective writer—there is a shortage of Urdu publishers. In fact, there does not appear to be even a single good publisher throughout the country. There are some whose existence or non-existence means the same, because their publications are limited only to a few third-rate novels which benefit neither the country nor the language. Some time ago, *Dairatul Adab* started in Delhi, but within a very short time the enthusiasm of its manager faded out. And he disappeared without even clearing the accounts of his creditors.

"I, therefore, agree with your proposal. I am, however, doubtful if one who is bearing the responsibility of running a magazine, would be able to give practical shape to a proposal such as yours. A first-rate Urdu journal is more than enough to keep a man busy. Otherwise, its standard falls. This being so, you yourself cannot do both the things at the same time, unless you get a good assistant. And because it is not possible to get a competent person in Lahore without paying a handsome salary, and also because *Kahkashan* cannot really bear this burden, you have no option but to close down *Kahkashan*, i.e. in order to take up publication work. In my humble opinion, if you wish to take up the work of publications, please close down the *Kahkashan*. What this journal is doing is also being done by several others or is proposed to be done by them.

"The field of publishing, however, is open. And the opportunities to serve that you would get through the publications, would be many more than through the journal. I don't mean to say that you do not serve through a monthly journal. But the resources of a journal are somewhat limited, and these make its scope restricted. For instance, you cannot publish in the journal a voluminous or scholarly, historical article until it is presented in an analytical form. . . . Philosophy, poetry, chemistry, etc.—all these fields are closed to you. All you need for the journal are articles on current topics, a few jokes, interesting anecdotes and colourful stories, so much so that you are afraid to touch voluminous novels. These may entertain the people, but do not serve literature; these do not add to the permanent treasure of knowledge. How badly Urdu stands in need of books on different topics is beyond description. The chief reason, of course, is our political enslavement. Nevertheless, we have not yet devoted to literature the attention that it deserves.

"If we have to protect our self-respect, we shall have to develop our literature. And whether individuals do it, or groups of individuals do it, it cannot be successful until it is done on the basis of business principles. If you could have a joint venture with others for publishing books, it would be wonderful. At a commercial centre like Lahore, it should not be very difficult to launch a venture like this. Anyway, if you want to enter the field of publishing, please close down *Kahkashan*, particularly at a time when you are undergoing losses. This is my friendly advice. I hope you won't take my frankness amiss."

Later: "It is good that you have decided to close down *Kahkashan*. It meant to you losses and unnecessary headache. . . . You should spend your leisure hours either on improvement of your future prospects or on writing. Was your scheme of going to U.K. dropped?"

Taj was also a writer of some merit. In his letters to him, Premchand freely gives his comments on Taj's writings which included a biographical sketch of Gandhiji. "Read your *Anna*; it is excellent. If I fear serious rivalry with its author, I should be forgiven. I am looking forward to the next instalment. . . ." Again: "*Zubeida* is a powerful composition; you have attained new heights of imagination"; and "*Naabeena Jawan* was something unique; you must write another of that standard!"

A few years later, when Imtiaz Ali Taj's drama *Anarkali* was published, Premchand wrote to him: "(This) is the first drama in Urdu that I have read from beginning till end at one stretch. I do not claim to have read all the dramas in Urdu, but in none that I have read so far, have I found the same gripping interest as in *Anarkali*. I am prepared to place it alongside the best dramas in English. . . ."

We have skipped a few years. Let us now get back to the period when Taj was on the way to become the leading publisher of Premchand's short story collections and, later on, of his novels. It was also at this time that Premchand contemplated the establishment of a printing press of his own.

## In Search of a Press

IT WAS AN old ambition of Premchand to set up an institution like *Zamana*, which could publish its own journal and books and have a printing press of its own. Nigam, who had run into financial difficulties, however, wanted Premchand to go down to Kanpur and join hands with him so that the two could work together. He told Premchand that he was wasting his time in a teacher's job which was not his line.

"I admit," wrote back Premchand, "but what is the way out? Journalism requires sacrifice and I wish to limit sacrifice to my own self; I do not wish my family and children also to be ground in the mill. Today I get my bread all right. The little bit of literary work that I do, is also sacrifice. Literary work, I might say, is no small sacrifice. One who donates a part of his surplus income to a school cannot correctly evaluate the sacrifice of people like us who deny themselves even sleep. You haven't yet shown me the way to free myself from the worries of earning a livelihood. . . . The propositions you have put forward have been airy and of a temporary nature. They do not satisfy me because there is no element of permanency in them, enabling me to meet the daily needs.

"One cannot yet make journalism a career. There is so much to worry and so much to bother about in this field. There is none to pay more than fifty to sixty rupees. Even *Avadh Akhbar* looks for graduate translators and offers only one hundred. Time has not yet come when one can make journalism a career. You set up a concern like the *Leader*, bring out a monthly journal, and a daily newspaper, pay its employees well, and see how happily I run to you.

"A B.A. degree, if I get one, would enable me to become a headmaster in some 'aided' school on one hundred and twenty-five. There, in my ivory tower, I would be pushing my pen. I shall write one novel every year. This will be my service to the

nation. The articles that I shall write may also be included under the head 'service.' If, however, you could suggest a better way than this, I am at your disposal.

"At present I get about a hundred rupees. In ten years I would perhaps be able to leave behind me some four to five thousand rupees for my dependants." The future of the dependants was, in fact, a source of great worry. And it is important to remember that the dependants were not too many.

Premchand liked children, but not the idea of having too many of his own—at that age. Asked by Nigam whether an addition to the family was expected, he said: "There are no signs yet, and there is no desire on my part."

In September 1919, however, he got another son nicknamed "Mannu" who, when 11 months old, was stricken with measles. "The cries and the scenes he creates do not allow me to do any work," wrote Premchand. The child died on July 6, 1920. The mother wept. He held her by the hand and took her out of the room where the child's body lay. "Why do you weep?" he asked. "He was always sickly. What comforts did he give you in the eleven months of his life?"

After the child had been cremated the next day, he got all his clothes burnt. Everything reminiscent of the child was in fact thrown out. The room was washed with phenyle. *Havan* was performed in the room, and he himself locked it and threw away the key. For nine months, we are told, the room was not used.

"I have not yet got over the tragedy," he told Taj, "despite all efforts; his memory troubles me. I think it will be there with me till the end of my life. I take it to be the result of my own actions. I see the hand of God in this. Whatever suffering I had to go through, I have already gone through. Perhaps He wanted me to be freed of this burden. I have one son, aged four, and also a daughter. May God give these two a long life."

Premchand had passed his Intermediate examination while at Basti. Here, at Gorakhpur, he sat for the Bachelor of Arts examination. Offering English, Persian and History, he qualified for the degree in 1919 in the second division. He now started preparing for his M.A. and even deposited the fees! The possession of this degree, he thought, would bring within his reach a professorship so that he could retire on a handsome pension. It was important to ensure this; for, he—at the age of forty—was already

feeling old and sick. Hard work combined with a total absence of discipline in regard to food habits—he would easily be tempted and eat whatever came his way—the indifference to doctor's advice and medicines and the climate of Gorakhpur, in the Terai, aggravated his dysentery.

In a number of letters written at this time he spoke of the uncertainty of his own future and the difficult straits in which his family would land should he die prematurely.

"I have little hope of living," he told Nigam in one of the letters, "and wish that either you and I should leave this world together, or the interval between our departure be only a short one. In fact I wish to take the lead. The worry of death is killing. I sincerely desire to have faith in God, but I cannot bring myself round to it. Maybe, by associating with some *mahatma*, I may come on to the right path. My principal worry, of course, is about the future of my wife and children; for, should I die suddenly, who would look after them? There is none in my family to take on this burden. And among my friends, it is only you. If nothing else, I am sure you would look to their welfare for a year or two after my death."

And, as we have seen, he did go to the abode of the mahatmas—Hardwar. In a story entitled *Prarabdha*, written about the time he undertook the visit to Hardwar for improving his health, there is a significant passage which could apply to Premchand himself.

The principal character of the story "had been confined to death-bed for six months. His condition worsened with the passage of each day, and caused anxiety. He lost all faith in medical treatment. If there was any faith he had, it was only in Fate. Whenever a well-wisher mentioned the name of a doctor or a *hakim*, he would turn his face away. He had no hope of living. In fact, he hated the very mention of his ailment. He wished to forget for some time that he was in the jaws of death and desperately wished that he could throw away the unbearable burden of his worries for a moment and breathe freely.

"... He would listen attentively to discussions on all subjects except his ailment. No sooner did someone, out of sympathy and goodwill, mention the name of a medicine, than he would flare up. . . . He was a realist. Thoughts of heaven and hell, religion or irreligion, were outside his ken. Even the fear of the

unknown did not bother him. This is not due so much to mental lethargy as to the fact that the worries of this world had left little room for the worries of the other world."

While the above is from a story, here is what he wrote in an autobiographical essay: "Once when, along with some friends, I had to climb a staircase, I felt that my legs were refusing to move. While everyone else swiftly climbed the stairs, I had literally to crawl up. That day I felt that I was really weak and that I could not live long. I gave up the water treatment. . . . If I had only a few months to live, I said to myself, why not live cheerfully? I wanted to forget that I was a sick man, and any mention of my being sick hurt me.

"One evening while I was passing through the Urdu Bazaar, I met Dashrath Prasad Dwivedi,\* editor of *Swadesh*, whom I knew and with whom I used to exchange ideas on literature. When he saw my condition, he was perturbed. 'You look absolutely pale, Babuji,' said Dwivedi. 'You must get yourself treated.'" Premchand felt annoyed and retorted back: "The worst that can happen is that I shall die. Well, let me die. I am ready to welcome death."

Dwivedi, wrote Premchand, felt sorry "and later on I myself felt sorry to have uttered the words that I had."

The visit to Hardwar finds an echo in this story, *Prarabdha*, which portrays the pitiable condition of a *seth* who has fallen on evil days and has been confined to bed for some six months. Unable to bear the thought of his wife and infant son falling on evil days, he administers poison, given him for massaging, to both his wife and his infant son. Having done this heinous deed, he decamps and meets *sadhus* and ultimately recovers. He is now remorseful for having administered poison to his wife and son. One day he is spotted by a youngman who turns out to be none other than his own son who has grown up in the fifteen years since the *seth*'s disappearance. The son has built up quite a

\*One of Premchand's friends at Gorakhpur, who had given up his low-paid job in the then North Western Railway, to take part in the political movement. Apart from being a powerful orator, Dwivedi wielded a facile pen and possessed a sharp intellect. After working some time on Shahid G. S. Vidyarthi's *Pratap*, Kanpur, Dwivedi started the *Swadesh* Printing Press and a weekly entitled *Swadesh* from Gorakhpur. Dwivedi wielded considerable influence in the areas around Gorakhpur and proved a pillar of strength for the non-cooperation movement.



fortune and has earned a name. He brings his father to Lucknow where the latter sees his son's impressive mansion and a school built by the seth's wife in memory of her husband. The seth is so disgusted with his own meanness that he ends up his life by drowning himself in the Gomati.

In *Putra Prem*, a well-to-do but calculating lawyer does not agree to send his favourite son who contracts tuberculosis for treatment to Italy because he feels that it would be a waste of money. Instead, he sends his second son, who is not half as brilliant, to get a barrister's degree; it is an "investment." The elder son dies. While he is being cremated, the lawyer witnesses the impressive cremation of another man whose son, he finds, has spent his all for the treatment of his father—"money is, after all, only the dirt of one's hand." The lawyer feels remorseful and makes up by spending lavishly on the last rites of his son—his conscience money!

Mention might also be made of another story entitled *Mrityu ke Picche*\* which is the life story of Babu Ishwar Chandra who, inspired by the ideals of service to the nation, interrupts his studies for a law degree, and becomes the editor of a paper through which he wishes to serve the people. His wife is opposed to the idea of his giving up law as a career and taking to the uncertainties of a journalistic career. She is right. Editorship is no bed of roses; in fact, it turns out to be one of thorns and there is little money in it. But accumulation of wealth has never been Ishwar Chandra's goal of life. He is honoured as the hero of many a campaign.

After some time a number of competitors come up and his paper is not as successful as it was in the past. He wants to involve his son who is studying law, in the editorial work. But his wife does not agree that her son also should take up the life of an editor. She had had enough of it. The son, therefore, goes in for a career in law and does well. The editor dies and is honoured. When on his death anniversary the wife sees the

\*Not included in *Mansarovar* series. In Urdu it appeared as *Baad az Marg*. Some critics have read into this story an account of Premchand's ideals and life. The letter to Taj gives the impression that this story more probably related to Daya Narain Nigam, the editor of *Zamana*, who faced difficulties and hardships in keeping the journal going. Premchand was not editing any journal and his *Hans* was to appear 10 years later.

honours being bestowed upon the memory of her dead husband, she feels happy and wants the son to leave law and take to journalism!

It is interesting to recall that Premchand told Taj that this "is the story of a friend—with just a little addition at the end. The story is for *Subh-e-Ummid*. Please let me have the criticism of 'Patras'\* on this."

Premchand wanted a change; and Nigam, as in the past, wanted him to be in Kanpur to collaborate with him in the running of *Zamana*. In February 1920, he offered to get him the post of a teacher in the Marwari School at Kanpur. Premchand turned it down. "If at all I serve in the Marwari School, it will be only as the headmaster. A teacher's job in the Marwari School is not acceptable to me, no matter what salary is offered. I am a teacher here, too, but I have plenty of leisure and the headmaster is nice to me. I see little advantage in a changeover. Why should I think of having a change from here? If a decision is taken on my representation before July next, I may get something more. In that case I would be better off here than there."

Nigam, however, was still keen and he pressed on.

"Teaching is only a means of livelihood," wrote back Premchand in March 1920. "There is little fame in it. I know of your troubles and difficulties and feel sorry and helpless. It is with the idea of being of help to you that I have always been keen to come to Kanpur so that we could join hands and work together. I can start a press, and even a journal. My brother, Mahtabrai, is now manager in my friend Poddar's press on Rs. 70 a month. He knows the work. Poddar is now thinking of giving him a share in the profits. When I start a press, I shall call him here."

Six months later, Mahtabrai wrote to Premchand that Poddar or his partners wanted to enter into partnership with him on a fifty-fifty basis in the printing press. The venture was to involve an investment of Rs. 9,000, Mahtabrai's share coming to Rs. 4,500. He wanted Premchand to arrange for the money.

Premchand, on his part, viewed the proposition favourably. "I have entered into a partnership in a printing press in Calcutta," he told Nigam. "I shall have to pay Rs. 5,000. If your financial condition is not bad, please do help me at this time. I badly need Rs. 200. If you could lend it to me, I shall be grate-

\*The pen-name of Ahmed Shah Bokhari.

ful. After *Prem Batisi* is published, I'll know where I stand. You deduct the sum from the initial sales. This time, however, I shall not be able to pay more than 30 per cent as commission. If, however, you buy 100 copies each of the two volumes, I shall pay 40 per cent as commission; you will thus get books worth Rs. 300 for Rs. 220 only. Anyway, do please send me Rs. 200, or more. I have to arrange for Rs. 4,000 before Dussehra. The plea of empty-handedness will not be accepted. Your money, as you know, is safe. At worst you'll lose only the interest."

His wife encashed her promissory notes worth Rs. 3,000. Premchand sent Rs. 1,500 to Mahtabrai. His cousin, Baldevlal, contributed Rs. 1,000 with a promise to contribute another Rs. 500 later. Premchand wrote to Taj that "I have entered into partnership in a press and need some money. The partner is an admirer of mine. He has not pressed for it; nor would he."

A fortnight later he asked Taj to arrange for Rs. 200 if his financial position was not bad. "If you could loan me this amount, I shall be extremely grateful." He also told Taj that he intended taking up printing in Urdu, Hindi, English and Bengali. "My younger brother is good at press supervision and I may not have to bother much about it. But then, is there a business without botheration? Botherations and struggles are an essential part of modern life. How can one get out of them?"

Mrs. Premchand, however, insisted that the partnership should be in the name of Dhunnu. As the saving was hers, she said, she was entitled to her own decision. Premchand accordingly wrote to Poddar. Mahtabrai, told of this by Poddar, was furious. Premchand had to pacify him. "We can look after ourselves," he wrote on October 7, 1920, "but we have to arrange for the future of our children. That's why it has been suggested that Dhunnu should be the partner in name, and you his guardian and trustee in Calcutta. If you had had a son, I can assure you, I would have ensured that the partnership would have been in the joint names of Dhunnu and your son. If I live long, I shall prove my intentions. I have a wife. So have you. I don't wish that, after my death, they should be quarrelling amongst themselves and trying to overawe each other. There's another aspect, too. Whatever I do for my son I do with my own earnings. Mrs. Mahtabrai has to act only as a guardian to my son. No more.

"I agreed to the proposal for partnership in the press in Calcutta only because I appreciate your devotion and loyalty to the family. In fact, I have always wanted you to live in Banaras and look after the family, freeing me from this burden. I had thought profits from the press would go towards the construction of the house (in Lamhi). For, otherwise, there is little hope of our saving anything for that purpose. . . . That is why I made you enter the printing business. . . . And I shall make all efforts to see that the press is set up at Banaras. . . .

"I have been opposed to the idea of taking money on loan for investment. That explains why I offered to finance the entire project. This, however, should not have resulted in scenes between you and your wife. . . . When you get a son, I would like the two cousins, my son and yours, to be entitled to an equal share in their joint names. . . .

"In two or three years, God willing, we shall be the owners of the press, and then shift it to Banaras and run it. I shall send you Rs. 2,500. Baldevlal would send you Rs. 500. In addition, there would be Rs. 250 out of my salary, Rs. 200 from *Jalva-i-Isar* and Rs. 350 from *Prem Batisi* and *Baazaar-i-Ilusn*. In other words, we shall pay off Rs. 1,000 by January (1921), and in the following month Raghupati Sahai Firaq will also give us Rs. 700. Thus, we shall pay off all the dues before April and you shall be the half proprietor of the press."

Three days later he told Mahtabrai that "my people are against the establishment of a press in Calcutta. Poddar tells me that our share of the profits would total Rs. 800, in addition to Rs. 450 as interest on the capital. In other words, the total profits would be Rs. 1,200 a year. Now if we set up a press at a cost of Rs. 5,000 at Banaras, wouldn't we get a profit of at least Rs. 1,200 a year? I think we would. In no case should it be less. I know of smaller presses with a total investment of Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 3,000, yielding a profit of Rs. 100 a month. I would, therefore, like you to be on the lookout for another press, complete with type, treadle machine, etc. If a second-hand press is not available, you may place orders for new machinery. You would, of course, ensure that the cost does not exceed Rs. 5,000. As I have told you, I've got Rs. 3,000, and shall have another Rs. 1,000 by April-May next, on realisation of the dues from my Lahore publishers and from Raghupati Sahai (Firaq). Mean-

while, I shall be on the lookout for a press in Kanpur, or Allahabad, or Banaras. Recently, I understand, two persons bought machinery from Banaras at a fairly low price. The Taluqdar Press at Fyzabad could be had for Rs. 3,000. I am still awaiting further information from Munshi Gulhazarilal.

"In so far as the decision about having the press at Banaras is concerned, you can take it as final. Your being away in Calcutta makes me feel cut off at a time when I need a supporter close at hand. My health is failing, and going from bad to worse. Even the water treatment has done me little good. I sincerely desire, therefore, that arrangements be made for your permanent stay at Banaras. This would also enable you to look after the family. Sitting in Calcutta you cannot do so. If I were to die suddenly—with you in Calcutta and my family in Banaras—everyone would experience difficulty. I would, therefore, request you to think of returning to Banaras.

"Arrangements for Rs. 5,000 would certainly be made and you need have no worry on that account.

"If you set up a press before March-April (1921), we shall come to Banaras, rent out a house and settle down there. The press and your residential apartment should be in the same building. My children would either be with me or at Banaras. During the vacations, I shall also come to Banaras and help you.

"The press should get going in six months to a year. We shall then undertake the construction of the house. You would buy a bicycle and supervise the construction too. In this way we shall make provision for the future, and I shall die with the firm belief that the family has been provided for. If you stay on in Calcutta, neither of these objects would be fulfilled, nor would my worry be over. (I might also mention that) Daya Narain Nigam and Rambharose\* want to take me on as a partner in their press with a total investment of Rs. 20,000. But I do not see any advantage in any place other than Banaras. A press elsewhere may yield a better result, but I will not have the assurance that the family is well provided for and that they would live honourably after I am gone. . . .

"It's also possible that I may get myself transferred to Banaras. That would be good. We shall live together and help each

\*Rambharose Seth, ex-Deputy Collector and a close friend of Nigam.

other in the work. Whatever we are able to save shall be reinvested in expanding the business. If possible, we shall buy an acre or two of agricultural land—large enough for one plough—so as to meet the family's needs in foodgrains. The press should provide for other needs. We shall make an attempt to have the press in Nadesar or Chetganj.

"I am aware that initially it would call for an effort which would be much greater than that required in Calcutta. With an eye on the future, however, it is necessary. You explain the position to Poddar in clear terms, get the money back and entrust it to some reliable party. If you come across a proposition for some press, this could be utilised as earnest money. Anyhow, you should come here in Dusschra, and we shall discuss other relevant details. Looking to the state of my health, I cannot approve of your continued stay at Calcutta. Your stay at Banaras would also help my literary activities. We'll also undertake the publication of books.

"Till, however, the arrangements for the press are made, I think you should continue in service either at Poddar's or elsewhere. And, if you have the future of the family close to your heart, you should leave Calcutta for good before April. This, then, is my final decision and I shall not alter it in any way. I leave it to you to decide whether second-hand machinery would do, or you would consider new machinery to be an advisable proposition. I have little experience in this line to be of any guidance to you. . . . I had asked Baldevlal for Rs. 500. Before, however, he received my letter, he had already dispatched Rs. 1,000. He is, without any doubt, an honest and straightforward man."

"I agree with you," he wrote to Nigam on the same day, "that my press should be either at Banaras or in Allahabad or Kanpur. Chhuttak came here on his way to Gorakhpur. The Gyan Mandal of Banaras have offered him a post at Rs. 70 per month and today he has gone to them. He may not return to Calcutta. Yesterday's *Pratap* carried an announcement about the sale of the Light Press in Kanpur. Why can't we join hands and buy it over? I have got some Rs. 4,000, and if I make some efforts, I can raise some more. If the press is a running concern, please negotiate with them and finalise the deal. When you inform me that you have done so, I shall come and take it over. I shall then leave Chhuttak at Kanpur to manage the press under your

supervision—in an honorary capacity. You'll get this card on your return from Banda and within three days' time I shall be expecting your reply."

Premchand also informed Taj that "I have given up the idea of going in for a press in Calcutta which is so far away. I now propose to set up one within this province. The Light Press at Kanpur is for sale, and I am now corresponding in this regard. If the deal is finalised, I shall resign my job."

By December 1920, "the idea of setting up a press is abandoned. I have invested the money in government securities. The money is safe."

IN ONE OF the ancillary themes in *Sevasadan*, Premchand had given his readers a glimpse into the problems of Indian peasantry. Mahant Ram Das who had succeeded to the *gaddi* of the temple-god Bankeybehari, in whose name the lands stood, levied all sorts of taxes on his tenants. On return from a pilgrimage, for instance, he levied a tax of five rupees per pair of bullocks. Chaitu, the poor old *ahir*, whose crops had been destroyed, could not pay this levy, and not only did he refuse to pay but also refused to sign the IOU.

The mahant's disciples or the disciples of Bankeybehari, therefore, one day bodily dragged him to the temple and beat him. His hands and feet being tied, he could not hit back. But he adequately compensated with his biting words and rebukes. The beatings continued till he was unconscious. And he died the same night. (It was, in fact, in connection with this murder that the mahant had bribed Kishenchand whose daughter Suman was about to be married, and had later got him arrested and sentenced to long imprisonment.)

As the principal theme that Premchand was handling in *Sevasadan* was related to prostitution in the "pucca mohalla," or the urbanised part of Banaras inhabited by absentee landlords, the problem symbolised by the poor tenant-cultivator Chaitu was lost sight of. In the last part of the novel, however, Premchand had taken his readers out of the vitiating atmosphere of Banaras city to the "kutcha mohalla," or its outskirts or the countryside where *Sevasadan*, the home for the daughters of prostitutes, was started.

It will be of interest to mention that in none of his major original novels written subsequently, did Premchand return to the life in the cities. They deal largely with the life of the people in the villages, the city-dwellers appearing only when their work relates to the life in the villages.



Swami Gajanand never stayed in the city for more than a couple of nights; he went about the villages devoting his entire time to the welfare of the little daughters of poor peasants. Kanwar Anurudha Singh was about to start a *kisan sabha* which could protect the peasants from the high handedness of the *zamindars*. Padam Singh, the chairman of the municipal committee, was trying to raise a fund from which money could be lent to poor tillers of the soil at a nominal interest for the purchase of seeds, etc. His right-hand man was his nephew, Sadan Singh who, in fact, had a dual personality. While he desired to be kind to the peasants, he would not approve of the tillers exercising pressure to extort concessions from the *zamindars*, the class to which he belonged. All these show that Premchand's interest had clearly shifted to the problems that affected the life of the villagers.

It may be recalled here that when Nigam, a nominated member of the U.P. Government's advisory committee for the *War Journal*, Allahabad, asked Premchand if he could undertake the responsibility of the Urdu edition of the journal, the latter wrote back: "I do not consider it a service to the nation. It is essentially a job for the translators, not journalists.... Please keep me out of it."

What then was national service? This is clear from an earlier letter dated July 6, 1918. He had said: "Let me go my own way. My life's aim is to become the headmaster of a privately-run (as against government-run) school, to edit some good paper which should espouse the cause of the peasants and labourers, and be of some service to the people."

He had tried unsuccessfully for the post of lecturer in Urdu at the Osmania University, and of headmaster of the D.A.V. School at Kanpur.

Premchand, it seems, had been deeply influenced by the events in Russia where the Bolsheviks had captured power to ameliorate the lot of the peasants and workers. This is clear from his writings of the time, in particular his article entitled *Daur-i-Qadim: Daur-i-Jadid* (the old epoch and the new), published in *Zamana* of February 1919, wherein he exposes the system under which the honest worker becomes a slave to the capitalist who has harnessed the machine, whereas the poor have to fight bloody wars launched by the moneyed classes. This essay

gives an impression that Premchand was an avid reader of literature relating to the Russian revolution.

The benefit that any measure of reform would bring to the peasants was, in fact, his new yardstick. The only good point regarding the Montague-Chelmsford reforms then being introduced, according to him, was that "the educated section of the people will get some more representation, some more seats, some more jobs. And just as today this class is sucking the blood of the people by becoming their *vakil*, so it would cut the throats of the people by becoming the ruling class. In effect, I don't think if any right whatsoever has been conferred by the Act upon the people. The rights seemingly given, have been hedged in by so many conditions that their being granted or not being granted, amounts to the same thing. . . . I have gradually come to believe in Bolshevik principles."

Pratapgarh, Rae Bareilly and Fyzabad—the three districts with which Premchand was familiar—had become the scene of a great agrarian upheaval in the wake of the crushing exactions by the *taluqdars* and their "inhuman treatment" making their condition totally intolerable.

According to Jawaharlal Nehru, who came to be associated with the agitation, the movement was against the "crushing and ever-growing burden of rent, illegal exactions, ejection from land and mud huts, beatings; surrounded on all sides by vultures who preyed on them—zamindar's agents, moneylenders, police—toiling all day to find that what they produced was not theirs and that their reward was kicks and curses and a hungry stomach."

These problems became the theme of Premchand's next novel started on May 2, 1918. Provisionally named *Nakaam*, it was first published, as we shall see, as *Premashram*. The novel appears to have been started towards the middle of 1918, that is soon after his *Baazaar-i-Husn* had been completed. The first draft (in Urdu) had been "nearly finished" by February 1920. Side by side he was doing other things also. The tremendous popularity of his *Sevasadan*, for instance, encouraged him to publish *Vardan*, the Hindi version of his *Jalva-i-Isar*. While the Urdu novel had appeared under the name of "Navabrai," *Vardan*, published by the Granth Bhandar of Bombay, carried the author's name as "Premchand." *Saraswati's* critic, believing that the

book was written after *Sevasadan* said: "It is not of the standard of *Sevasadan*. The flow of the plot is not too smooth. . . . The incidents are not so dovetailed as to arouse the curiosity of the reader." After commenting upon the characterisation, particularly of Virjan and Pratapchandra, however, the reviewer said: "The novel is nevertheless beautiful, and only such as Premchand alone can write."

Premchand also translated George Eliot's *Silas Marner*. Published as *Sukhdas*, the little book (of 59 pages in large type) retained only the "bare bones" of the story and adapted it to Indian conditions. It carried an introduction by Premchand about George Eliot and her works, as also a preface wherein the writer said that the original novel was a unique portrayal of the working of the human heart. The author had so well portrayed the subtlety of thoughts, added the translator, that "according to many an expert of English novel, it is the best novel in that language." *Sukhdas* did not claim to be the "translation" of the novel. It had been disrobed of its British clothing and dressed in Indian attire. All the dresses, ideas, places, conventions, were steeped in the "nationalist" colours. "That, at least, is what has been attempted here."

Side by side, Premchand was busy translating his novel, provisionally named *Nakaam*, from Urdu into Hindi in which language it was published first. The novel, which appeared as *Premashram*, opens with the exactions and levies forced upon the villagers of Lakhanpur by the zamindar's agents, one of whom, Girdhar, advances money for ghee and insists on buying it at the rate of a seer to the rupee while the current market rate is ten chhataks to a rupee. When peasant Manohar says he cannot afford to rear cows for providing ghee to the zamindar or to the officials, Girdhar threatens him. "If you till the zamindar's land," he says, "you cannot afford to disobey his commands."

Government officials on tour are no different. They are like the typical beasts prowling about the countryside after sunset. Like locust swarms that come across darkened skies towards the end of October, there are bivouacs and camps in the countryside. There is a commotion. People hide themselves for life. Even the honest and the most conscientious officials behave differently when they reach the villages. They also impose great hardships on the poor villagers. The lower the status of the offi-

cial or the agent, the greater his enthusiasm for exaction. The peons attached to officials are the most heartless. They compel poor peasants to forced labour. The orderlies of Jwala Singh, Deputy Magistrate, demand provisions from Baseshar, rob Dapat Singh of his stock of firewood, and saintly Kadar Mian of the goat being fattened for sacrifice on Bakr-Id. A sick old woman on her way to hospital is thrown out of her bullock cart because the orderlies want a vehicle for transporting wood.

Manohar's son, Balraj, is a hotheaded youth. He reads newspapers and knows what is happening in other parts of India and the world. He tells Manohar: "You behave as if the cultivator is nobody, and that he has been created only to provide forced labour to the zamindar. I read in the newspaper that the cultivators constitute the ruling class in Russia. They do what they want. In another country closeby, the cultivators have overthrown the king, and they are now being ruled by a *panchayat* of peasants and workers." Balraj is opposed to forced labour and thinks that it is imposed by the subordinates with the connivance of their bosses. He tells his father: "You won't live long. It is we who will have to bear all the extortions. And I tell you that we shall not submit to this kind of a thing without a protest. After all, the zamindar cannot ride roughshod over us; and if he does so and turns a deaf ear to us, we (brandishing his *lathi*) shall use this." He is convinced that the future is the tiller's and not the zamindar's. He protests against the tyrannies of the zamindar's agents to Jawala Singh. His and his father's names are "noted" by the zamindar's tyrannical agent, Ghaus Khan, who devises ever new methods of illegal exactions on behalf of his master, the zamindar of Lakhanpur.

The zamindari of Lakhanpur has been inherited by two brothers, Jatashankar and Prabhashankar. Jatashankar, on his death, leaves behind two sons, Premshankar and Gyanshankar. While the former is an idealist and goes to the USA to learn improved methods of agriculture, the scheming Gyanshankar takes over the management of the zamindari. His seventy-year old uncle, Prabhashankar, who agrees to entrust the zamindari to Gyanshankar only to avoid family quarrels, has three sons, one of them, Dayashankar, in the police department. The uncle belongs to the old order. When the ancestral house is dilapidated, he wishes it to be repaired, to erect a support here and

another there. Gyanshankar, on the other hand, wants to get it pulled down so as to build a new one.

Prabhashankar wants the tenants to go on paying the old rates and till the land. He tells Manohar: "You are amongst our old tenants. Your happiness is vital to our prosperity. You know that we have never been hard on you. In times of need we have asked you to give us free labour, and you have always gladly done so. Till now we have got along somehow. But it will be different with our children." It was indeed different. Gyanshankar thought differently.

Versatile writer and an orator of sorts, a weathercock who would change sides at the slightest notice, thoroughly unscrupulous, Gyanshankar does not do anything for his cousin in the police department, who has been arrested on a charge of corruption. When, however, he is acquitted by Magistrate Jwala Singh (old friend and classmate), Gyanshankar claims all the credit for getting him released!

Gyanshankar lays claim to all the privileges, like forced labour, and imposes new taxes for raising money on one pretext or another. All these taxes have to be exacted from the tenants because, he says, the zamindar has now to spend more on several new things. As there was greater pressure on land, and as there were more people ready to bid, there was no reason why the zamindar should not take advantage of the situation to raise more money to meet new demands. The struggle for life, according to him, has become acute. The zamindar and the tenant, he says, cannot coexist; one of them must go.

Gyanshankar is furious at the changed attitude of his tenants. He enhances the revenue to teach them a lesson. His agent, Ghaus Khan, is the very picture of a blood sucker. He terrorises people, gets Balraj and others arrested on the faked charge of assaulting Jwala Singh's men. (It is only through the intervention and entreaties of Kadar Mian that they are released.) To ensure that the increase in the rates benefits him, and not his uncle's (larger) family, Gyanshankar brings about a division of the family assets against the advice of his wife, Vidya.

Having planned to usurp the entire share of Premshankar (his brother), Gyanshankar is perturbed when his brother returns from the USA. He poisons the ears of the women in the house against his foreign ways, etc. Because Premshankar is not

prepared to undergo the purification ceremonies enjoined on one who has undertaken a sea voyage, Gyanshankar gets him excommunicated. Even Premshankar's wife, Shraddha, does not go to her husband.

Premshankar's course of life is entirely different. Separated from his family, having little money except what he could get for the ornaments sent to him by his wife as a proof of her undying love for him, he begins to live in Hajipur village which he helps save from the ravages of plague and a devastating flood. He is adored by the inhabitants of this village, as also of Lakhanpur, whom he has helped to successfully contest the increase in the rates of revenue. A believer that none should live on another's earnings, that the land belongs to those who till it, he feels he must expiate for the sins of his forefathers who extorted money and free labour from the tenants. He, therefore, severs his connections with the ancestral estate and starts a farm where he practises cooperative farming.

When Gyanshankar's father-in-law, Rai Kamalanand, loses his only son, Gyanshankar is very happy because Kamalanand's other daughter, Gayatri, is a widow and has no issue. The heir to Kamalanand's estate, therefore, is to be Gyanshankar's son, Mayashankar. Gayatri is rich from her father-in-law's side also. Gyanshankar wishes to annex her estate at Gorakhpur for his son Mayashankar. With these designs, he casts his charms on Gayatri who is devoted to her husband's memory.

Gayatri snubs him and he leaves Lucknow for Lakhanpur, a frustrated man. Acting on Kamalanand's advice, he uses his literary abilities and his contacts with the press to build for Gayatri a reputation for liberal mindedness and devotion to religion, and gets her a title of Rani. Somewhat under his charms, she invites him to go to Gorakhpur to manage her estate. He raises the income.

Gyanshankar, who is called by his father-in-law to Lucknow to help organise a music conference, betrays his designs on Gayatri. The father-in-law is annoyed and tells him to put a stop to his designs. Enraged, Gyanshankar poisons Kamalanand who escapes death only because of certain supernatural powers that he wields.

Back in Lakhanpur, Ghaus Khan stops the people from using the village tank, the principal source of water supply. He im-

pounds Manohar's cattle grazing in the village common land, and insults Manohar's wife and his men kick her. Non-violence is "abdicated" when it comes to meeting the insult to one's wife. The insult to Manohar's wife leads to the murder of Ghaus Khan by Manohar. After the crime, Manohar surrenders to the police and confesses his guilt in order to save his son and others from being harassed. A charge of conspiracy to murder is framed against Manohar, Balraj and other people of Lakhanpur, including Kadar Mian. Premshankar finances the villagers to contest the case. Police cook up evidence. Manohar commits suicide. Balraj, Kadar Mian and others are convicted.

As Gayatri is religiously inclined, Gyanshankar becomes a great devotee of the Krishnaleela cult, taking the role of Krishna for himself and making Gayatri act Radha's. Gayatri understands the sham she is going through and builds a temple and a *dharmashala* for which special taxes are levied on the tenants. She also comes to be elected president of the Sanatan Dharma Sabha, which means more taxes on the poor tenants. When Gyanshankar shows two letters indicating hostility and unwillingness of the tenants to pay several new taxes, Gayatri, the goddess of love, is the very picture of anger. "So this fire of revolt is spreading to my estate also." She gives Gyanshankar a free hand. The result is atrocities.

Kamalanand warns the daughter against the evil designs of Gyanshankar. To counter it, Gyanshankar invites her to Lakhanpur for the Krishnaleela. Vidya, too, has been apprised by her father of Gyanshankar's motives. She returns to Lakhanpur to find her husband and her sister carrying on a romance in the name of staging the Krishnaleela. She feels miserable. Gyanshankar, however, is able to induce Gayatri to adopt Mayashankar as her son and heir to her estate. Vidya feels she has lost not only her husband but also her son and commits suicide. The suicide and what she herself hears about Gyanshankar from almost everybody, open the eyes of Gayatri. She sends him to the Gorakhpur estate of hers. She converts her estate into a trust as had been desired by her late husband, with Gyanshankar as the manager and Premshankar as the guardian and teacher of Mayashankar. She goes on a pilgrimage to Badri Kedar in the Himalayas. Disgusted, she commits suicide almost within sight of Kamalanand who had also gone there after appointing

Mayashankar as his heir. In a way, thus, the dream of Gyanshankar is fulfilled. He turns religious, distributes one thousand blankets to the poor and repents his previous actions.

Jwala Singh resigns his post and goes with Premshankar. Shraddha also joins her husband Premshankar. She now sees that the cause which her husband has been espousing is noble and just. Premshankar is elected to the State legislature with tremendous popular support and at almost no expense (as against Gyanshankar's expenditure of a fortune). In the legislature Premshankar proposes several reforms to improve the lot of the villagers and makes his village a model one.

The events that he has seen convince Mayashankar that the correct path to follow is not that of his father Gyanshankar, but of his uncle Premshankar. The occasion of his becoming a major provides him the opportunity to publicly renounce his zamindari and make the tenants the full owners of the lands they till. He thus atones for the ill treatment and the extortions perpetrated by his father. In the presence of the governor, he tells the tenants: "I am convinced I have no right to yoke the tenants. It will be moral degradation and cowardice on my part if I sacrifice my principles for personal comforts. Who would like a life of degradation? I, therefore, here and now renounce all rights devolving on me through tradition and social laws. I free my subjects from all shackles. No longer would they be my tenants and I their taluqdar. From this day, they are my friends and brothers, owners of the land they till."

Finding that he has lost everything that he had worked for all through his life, Gyanshankar ends his own life by drowning. His life has been in vain—*nakaam*.

The change of heart in Premshankar and Mayashankar fits in with Gandhian philosophy. So does that of Jwala Singh who resigns from government service. Says Sheelmani, his wife: "When my husband wanted to resign three years ago, I thought he had little reason except trying to shirk work. During these years, however, I have seen that no government servant can protect his self-respect and honour. Government creates obstacles in the way of reforms suggested by the nation's leaders. It suppresses the freedom movement which grows through the popularisation of the *charkha*, through the boycott of the foreign cloth and through the prohibition of narcotics and alcohol. . . .



“I have seen that during the last world war, the British Government in India raised the so-called ‘loans’ which in effect were compulsory taxes. Suppression was resorted to and pressure of all types brought to bear upon the poor people to contribute to war loans. Some of them were indeed forced to sell their bullocks, and even their ploughs in order to subscribe to the loans. When a person refused to do so he was beaten up or harassed on one flimsy pretext or another. . . . As Jwala Singh did not oppress the people and left it to them to subscribe or not, the subscription from his area was lower than those from the others which had given lakhs of rupees. As a result, his superior officers complained against him, and he was demoted. When I saw all this I myself persuaded him to resign.”

The reasons for Jwala Singh’s resignation seem to have the imprint of the non-cooperation movement. This also reflects the feelings which led to Premchand’s own resignation from government service.

## Resignation

PREMCHAND WAS DEEPLY moved by the events following the Jallianwala Bagh massacre and sympathised with the policy pursued by Gandhiji.

In December 1919, Premchand was planning to attend the Amritsar session of the Indian National Congress. "I wish to go there. And I think I may have some money to undertake the journey. For the Gujarati edition of *Prem Pachisi*, I have been offered one hundred rupees. This will be enough to take me to Amritsar. The very thought of discomfort of journey, however, makes me hesitate. Dysentery has immobilised me. And, when I am not well, what fun can I ever derive from the session? I may, in fact, think of running away from there. In a situation like this I should be staying put."

And, in fact, he did not go to Amritsar—in spite of his deep feelings for the events in Amritsar and Lahore.

"The non-cooperation movement has resulted in great havoc in Lahore," he wrote to Taj ten months later. "Let us see which way the wind blows."

When after the autumn session of the Congress in Calcutta and the annual session at Nagpur, Gandhiji started on a tour of northern India, Premchand was anxiously watching. He was excited. "Gandhiji is due here today," he wrote to Taj from Gorakhpur.

A raised platform was erected for Gandhiji in the Gazimian Maidan, and the audience from Gorakhpur and the neighbouring villages that collected there numbered 200,000. Premchand had never seen such a vast concourse of people making their way to hear the Mahatma. Just recovered from his acute dysentery and still sick, he went to hear the Mahatma, and also took along his wife and his two children, daughter and son. (Such attendance by government servants, incidentally, was frowned upon by the government.) While Mrs. Premchand took a vow not to

use ornaments—"in a country where the average income is four and a half annas (28 nP), women had no right to put on ornaments"—Premchand became a follower of the Mahatma. "A glimpse of Gandhiji," says Premchand, "wrought such a miracle that a half-dead man like myself got a new lease of life."

Within a day or two, he responded to the call of the Mahatma asking teachers and professors and students to leave the schools and colleges, the lawyers to leave the courts and the government servants to resign their jobs, so as to bring the administration to a standstill.

Knowing fully well that he had passed his F.A. and B.A. examinations and had already sent in his admission fee for the M.A. examination, only with the idea of improving his prospects in the education department, of getting a professorship and retiring on a handsome pension; and well aware that he would lose a total monthly income of about Rs. 125, with little prospect of an alternate employment, Premchand decided to resign.

Mrs. Premchand tells us of the conversation that took place between the husband and the wife. The repressive measures that came in the wake of the Jallianwala tragedy had become unbearable. "We knew that each one in the country had to stand together against these laws and measures." She agreed with Premchand's proposal to resign because it was the duty of everyone to respond to the call of the times and also because the sudden recovery of Premchand from illness a little earlier had given her a new faith in the future. If he had not survived from the acute attack, she thought, she would have been left to her own resources—"some three thousand rupees for the three of you," and that's all. Now that he had recovered, there was hope of a prolonged life.

Premchand wrote out his resignation and handed it over to the headmaster of the school. Knowing that he had just recovered from illness, and the acceptance of his resignation might mean some difficulties for the family, he insisted that Premchand should withdraw it. But Premchand was firm. "I won't withdraw the resignation," he said, "and I shall not be attending the school from tomorrow." The headmaster asked Premchand to consult his wife before he insisted on its acceptance. "She has been consulted," said Premchand, "and in fact she has encouraged me to resign."

For some six days, it appears, no decision was taken on his resignation. On the seventh day the headmaster himself called at Premchand's house and asked him what had come over him that, having just recovered from a prolonged illness, he had resigned. "I don't want you to be rash," he said, "and am not willing to forward your resignation." He thought Premchand might have second thoughts. Premchand, however, was firm and adamant. "My conscience, Mr. Headmaster," said Premchand, "does not permit me to serve the Government any longer. I am being forced from my within to resign."

On February 15, 1921, he wrote to Nigam that he was through with government service and that his resignation had been accepted as from that date. None was more sorry than the headmaster and his colleagues. No less sorry were his pupils, many of whom wanted to leave the school to join the non-cooperation movement. It was characteristic of Premchand that he tried to persuade them to continue their educational career in the interest of their future. "The path I have chosen," he said, "is a difficult one. But I am in a position to earn enough to feed myself and my family. You, however, are not so placed in life. If you leave the school without completing your studies, you would land yourself into difficulties." However, a few of the pupils, we are told, did leave the school.

In a story entitled *Lal Feeta*,\* written about this time, there is the text of a resignation letter which could as well have been that of Premchand's letter of resignation. Says the hero of that story, Har Bilas: "Sir, it is my belief that God's will is reflected in the conduct of human affairs. His laws are based on truth, mercy and justice. For the last fifteen years, I have served the government and carried out my duties with the fullest loyalty and devotion. It is possible that on some occasions some of the superior officers were not fully satisfied because I have never taken it upon myself to carry out their personal wishes. Whenever there was a conflict between the orders of the superior officer and law, I followed the path of law. I have always understood government service as the best medium to serve the people and the country. The orders conveyed through Circular No.... dated...

\**Lal Feeta*, which appeared in Urdu under the same name, is not included in the eight volumes of *Mansarovar*. It was published in *Prem Chaturthi*.

however, are against my conscience and against my principles. They interfere, in my view, with truth and justice. I am unable to implement them. These orders are an obstacle in the way of the country's independence and constitute an attack on its political awakening. In the circumstances, for me to continue my relationship with the government would be a disservice to the country and to the nation. Along with other rights, the subjects have also the right to wage a political struggle. And as the government is determined to snatch away this right, I, as an Indian, am unable to serve the government. I request, therefore, that I be relieved of my post as soon as possible."

The story, incidentally, reflects the various thought currents following the Russian revolution and the non-cooperation movement in India. The hero, Har Bilas, son of a poor peasant, succeeds through his own efforts in getting higher education and entering, through competition, the provincial civil service. He is a true, honest and just official. In his efforts to do justice, however, he annoys some corrupt elements and is transferred more than once. But he is respected. When he gets secret instructions from the government, wrapped in a red tape, asking him to take strict action against those who wished to revive and strengthen the *panchayats*, those who preached, and those who put on *khaddi*, his conscience revolts. For, he believes in the good traditions of India of old. There is a conflict within, and he decides not to bow down.

It takes about a week to arrive at the decision and this with the help of his wife who supports him in his determination to obey the dictates of his conscience, and of his two sons who decide against prosecuting further studies and in favour of going back to the land. Har Bilas resigns his post and goes back to village where he is coopted, by common consent, on the village panchayat. The zamindar, to whom his father had mortgaged the ancestral land, returns it to Har Bilas gratis. The honour showered on Har Bilas by the people and the zamindar is an indication of the esteem in which those who resigned their jobs in connection with the non-cooperation movement were held.

No honour of this nature seems to have been showered on Premchand. But he was happy to have submitted his resignation. "I had become convinced," he said later, "that government service consisted of loyalty and sycophancy only. Self-respect,

self-realisation, self-help and self-confidence could not go hand in hand with government service. Forced by circumstances, I had to drink the 'poison' (of government service) and suppress the fire within me for several years. The breeze of non-cooperation, however, rekindled the fire within me. I resigned from government service and became a soldier in the (non-violent non-cooperation) battle for freedom."

**The room where Premchand  
was born**



**The house that Premchand  
built in Lamhi, his ancestral  
village**





Premchand's rented house in Benia Bagh, where he lived on the first floor. In front of the house is a big park where Premchand and Jayashankar Prasad took a stroll every morning.



Jawaharlal Nehru and Kamala Nehru at a meeting of Hindi writers at Banaras. Premchand (with Gandhi on the far left) is seated. Others include Jayashankar Prasad (from left), Ramchandra Shukla and Sampurnanand (fourth and eighth from right).



Shivrani Devi



The summer house of Bhairatendu Harishchandra, where Premchand lived in August 1936. On the right is the out-house where the Saraswati Press was housed.





holding this opinion that most of my stories are  
 tame and without any beauty. Perhaps the stories  
 he selected for translation are exceptions. What  
 can I say to this? There are readers who almost  
 tolerate even Victor Hugo & Tolstoi. I can only  
 say in my humility that I have done what  
 I could to the best of my talents & I do not lay  
 any claim to anything real.

Mr. Kishenkings' Chief objection seems to be  
 that Karmabhum has been written with the  
 back ground of a national movement. He  
 seems to forget that almost all great novels  
 have some social purpose or some great  
 movement as their back ground. What is  
 Tolstoi's War & Peace but a history of  
 Napoleon's rush on Moscow. But he has  
 made his struggle live in his pages. He has  
 introduced characters & incidents which reveal  
 his tremendous insight in human nature. It  
 is the development of character which counts

Facsimile of the cover page of  
the first issue of *Hans*



Premchand's residence as a teacher and Superintendent of the Normal School, Gorakhpur. In 1959, the students and teachers of the school collected funds to put up this statue of the author and a platform at the spot where he used to sit and write.



## As School Headmaster

THE "soldier in the battle for freedom" was inadequately equipped to jump into the non-cooperation movement. The only training that he had had was for journalism and book-writing. He toyed with the idea of starting a weekly Urdu paper from Gorakhpur, and again thought of establishing a press for the purpose, and asked for collaboration with Nigam. The old scheme of setting up a printing press was taken out of the shelf, as it were. There was, however, little progress. He took to the manufacture and popularisation of the *charkha*, the then principal Congress plank. For this work he joined hands with his friend and publisher, Mahavir Prasad Poddar, who shifted Premchand and his family to his house in village Maaniram, some thirteen miles from Gorakhpur. And to make it convenient for Premchand's family, he shifted his own also to the same village.

While Premchand would sit at the doorstep of Poddar to supervise the manufacture of the charkhas, Poddar would go to the town of Gorakhpur every day. Returning home he would bring medicine for Premchand, which did the latter some good. "Within a week of our going to the village," said Premchand, "my dysentery showed distinct signs of improvement and my stool was cleared of mucous." He added: "Freed from government service, I got freed from a nine-year old chronic ailment. This has made me a confirmed fatalist, and now it is my firm conviction that whatever happens, takes place only when He wishes it. Man's efforts succeed only when He so wishes."

Premchand's health having registered improvement, the two families shifted back to Gorakhpur again and rented a house where ten handlooms were installed. The charkhas manufactured at the village were also brought to Gorakhpur and sold. While this work and the scheme for a weekly, in collaboration with D.P. Dwivedi of Swadesh Press, made little progress,

Premchand decided to popularise the charkha in Lamhi also. For this purpose he shifted in March 1921 to his village, secured some wood from the local zamindar, got charkhas manufactured and, after explaining their economics and working, distributed them free to the peasants. He also devoted some time to his literary pursuits. The time devoted to these, however, seems to have been limited. For, in May 1921, we find Premchand turning down a request from Maulana Abdul Haque for an article on the plea that the subject required a good deal of research and study, and "being a non-cooperator, I cannot find enough time for it." He was writing an article per week for *Aaj* and also doing sundry work for a publishing house in Banaras where his brother was employed.

Premchand's routine consisted of getting up in the early hours of the morning, ablutions, a few snacks and continuous work till mid-day when he would bathe, and then luncheon, followed by rest for an hour. After the rest he would again devote himself to work. At about four o'clock, he would require some recreation in the form of fondling and playing with children, for whom he would sweep the threshold of his house and collect leaves, straw and sand, to be used for teaching the young children of the neighbourhood new games.

Later in the evening he would talk to cultivators in the village, with whom he would discuss their problems and difficulties. These discussions provided him with material for his "rural classics." He would also propagate the ideals of *swaraj* in political and economic fields, specially the implications of the new legislation that might be pending. His aim was also to help the villagers arrive at social cohesion.

It may, however, be mentioned that his presence in Lamhi puzzled the poor peasants. For, although they were pleased to hear all the things he had to say, they did not quite understand what he did in the village to earn a living. In fact, quite a few of them told him so. "You don't have much land to live on and stay at the house throughout the day and the night," they said. "We don't know what you do, and are curious to know how you can live without doing any work." The poor villagers could not understand what writing of fiction meant, and Premchand had to tell them jocularly that whatever else he might do, he did not approach them for any favours.

These sentiments, incidentally, are echoed in his story *Lal Feeta*, whose hero is also a puzzle to the villagers when he returns to his native village.

Life in the village, Premchand felt, was not all that easy. His output of stories declined. He could not write more than two or three a month, bringing him on an average about forty rupees a month. The final draft of *Premashram* too was not ready yet. It required sustained work, "preparing the final copy for the press means as much work as original writing." His frequent visits to Banaras involved considerable strain.

The revival of the old bickerings between the stepmother and his wife demolished the idyllic picture of the village life that he had painted in his mind. He wished to get out of this atmosphere.

The scheme to bring out an Urdu weekly in collaboration with Dashrath Prasad Dwivedi, had fallen through. His scheme to bring out one of his own was also nowhere near fruition. He had naturally to try for some job. The attempts made were in two directions: for the post of the headmaster of the Marwari High School in Kanpur, and also for the post of the secretary of the Municipal Committee of Banaras. While negotiations for the latter were going on, the former was fixed up with the assistance of Nigam and Vidyarthi whose word counted with Mahashe Kashi Nath (who worked on behalf of the managing committee of the school). Within a few months of his resignation from the Government School at Gorakhpur, Premchand had thus accepted a job of headmaster—of course, in a non-governmental school. He reached Kanpur towards the end of June 1921, leaving his family at Allahabad where a few days earlier, his father-in-law had expired. He returned to Allahabad, told his wife about his new assignment and, after a flying visit to Lamhi, joined duty. The stepmother wanted Premchand's family to stay on, but seeing the affairs in the joint household in Lamhi and the advanced stage of pregnancy of his wife, he insisted on the family accompanying him to Kanpur.

It was in his house on Maston Road in Kanpur that Premchand's second son, Amrit Rai (Bannu), was born a month or so later. Shivrani Devi had a long confinement. Premchand himself was sickly—once he was down with fever for more than ten days followed by an acute attack of dysentery

which, according to Mrs. Premchand, was aggravated "by a strong dose of some medicine administered to him to counter the fever."

His illness, however, did not deter him from devoting considerable time to writing. The most important work of this period was the preparation of the final draft of *Premashram* which, it seems, had been finalised only in February 1922. It monopolised most of his time. Stories conceived, or written, at this time included *Mooth*, *Purva Sanskar*, *Nag Pooja*, *Svatva Raksha*, *Selani Bandar* and *Adhikar Chinta*, etc.

*Mooth* is the story of a miserly doctor who makes more money by dabbling in stocks and shares than by medical practice. He is rich, but so stingy that he does not get ornaments that his wife dreams of, does not spend money for his mother and an old maidservant who has brought him up, to go on a pilgrimage. He does not even allow his own son to go in for higher education. One day the postman delivers him a packet with Rs. 750 in currency notes, which is his dividend from shares. The postman, however, exchanges the notes with silver rupee coins that he is carrying. The doctor keeps the silver coins in his box and rushes to a patient. On his return, he finds that the amount is short by Rs. 250.

He is agitated and disturbed, and goes to a witch doctor who says that someone in the house has stolen it. The medical practitioner does not think it likely that his mother, wife, son or the old maidservant could have stolen it. He asks the witch doctor to try his magic. The witch doctor, who is smoking and drinking when the doctor goes to him, demands money to buy the necessary materials. The arrangement is that the witch doctor would release a deadly *mooth*. Back home at the dead of night, the doctor tells what he has done. The information demoralises the old woman, Jagia, and she falls sick. At the dead of night, the doctor is awakened. She confesses. He is remorseful and rushes to the witch doctor and begs of him to save the old woman's life. The witch doctor's clever mother, who knows the son has done nothing, cleverly bargains with the doctor for the price of saving the old woman's life at the cost, she says, of his own life. Ultimately, the doctor pays the magician all the five hundred rupees to get the old woman back to normalcy. And when she recovers, he gives Rs. 250 to the old woman to enable

her to undertake a pilgrimage for which she had stolen the money.

*Mooth*, he told Taj, is "built round the events of a couple of hours and does not embrace two or three generations."

*Purva Sanskar* is the story of two brothers, the elder one who is worldlywise and the younger one who is good and saintly and helps everybody in times of need or difficulty. The latter cuts through his entire property and then begs of his brother to help him earn a living. The elder brother puts him in charge of a farm, but instructs him not to spend anything on *sadhus*, etc. The younger brother overworks and increases the yield, but secretly sells the surplus produce to feed *sadhus*. After his death the younger brother is reborn as a very handsome he-calf in his brother's house. The elder brother is attached to this thing of beauty. Then one day the six-year old calf, kept with great care, dies. The death had been predicted at the time of its birth. A *sanyasi* says that the calf was none other than the younger brother reborn, for he had to expiate these six years for his sin of hiding from his brother the fact that he secretly sold part of the produce. The handsomeness of the calf symbolised the greatness of his character in his previous life.

*Śvatva Raksha* is built round the life of a horse which has its own conception of rights and dignity. Having got accustomed to a day off in the week, on Sundays, it refuses to do any work on that day. The master is fond of the horse and gets reconciled. When a neighbour takes the horse out for a ride for his son who is now the bridegroom, the horse becomes stubborn and successfully faces the challenge to his pride. As the master had warned, the neighbour is humbled by the refusal of the horse to move. "I know today," says the neighbour, "how even an animal defends his rights and honour."

*Adhikar Chinta*, a bitter satire on the imperialists, is in the shape of a life-sketch of a dog which leaves its "beat" and creates another in a thick forest across the river where, after some time, it becomes the monarch of all that it surveys. Later on, however, the dog comes to grief.

*Nag Pooja* is an eerie story relating to a family in which snake is worshipped and fed on milk. When the only issue in the family, a girl, is to be married, her mother tells her that no matter what the hardship, she must ensure that no snake is killed



in her father-in-law's house. The girl's wedding takes place. Before the departure of the bridegroom, however, it is found that a snake has bitten the bridegroom to death. The girl becomes a widow. Her father breaks all conventions and makes arrangements for her second marriage. The girl apprehends a repetition of the story. And so it is. Despite the brilliant illuminations and all precautions, the second bridegroom is bitten by a snake which had hidden itself in the bridegroom's shoes. After some years, an expert on snakes volunteers to marry the girl about whose fate he has read in the papers. The father warns the person, a professor, but the latter is prepared for all the risks. The marriage this time is celebrated not in the girl's town, but in the town of the bridegroom. There is, however, a wall between the husband and the wife. The wife's personal behaviour is very different—she looks different and behaves differently, her eyes emitting fire, and she hisses like a snake. The professor is at a loss to understand this mystery. One day the husband decides to have it out. He sees a snake wriggling out from under her pillow. His wife is under the spell of the snake. She behaves as one. The husband then shoots her. The injury, however, is not on her person, but on the snake, who writhes in pain and dies. The wife now becomes normal, and is not aware of what she has gone through.

*Selani Bandar* is the moving story of the mutual attachment between a *madari*—the professional master of a trained monkey—and his wife, on the one hand, and the monkey on the other. The two treat the monkey like a son. One day, the monkey out of sheer mischief, escapes and goes to steal fruit from an orchard nearby. The owner of the orchard, a police official, gets the monkey caught and nearly starves it. Despite entreaties, the police official refuses to return the monkey unless he is paid ten rupees, which the poor madari is unable to manage. Robbed of his means of livelihood and dejected at the heartlessness of the police official, the madari dies and his wife turns mad. Meanwhile, the owner of a travelling circus buys off the monkey, and the monkey misses the master and his wife who had treated it so well. One day the circus catches fire, and the monkey, along with other animals, runs for life. It makes a beeline for the house where it had passed some of its happiest moments of life. It finds the house deserted. A little later, the

madari's widow turns up, a mad woman. The monkey recognises her and clings to her. She regains her senses. It is a reunion of the mother and her "son." The monkey now plays its pranks and begs money which it brings home for the "mother" who looks after the creature well.

While these and other stories were really welcomed by the Hindi journals, there were few journals in Urdu, excluding *Zamana*, that, according to him, would have received his stories. For, although there were certainly requests from some Urdu journals, especially those from Lahore, Premchand hesitated to write for them. "I cannot write in the language of which most Urdu journals of today present specimens," he told Taj. "Led by *Naqqad* of Agra, they specialise in employing complicated similes and idioms for saying very simple things. . . . To (admirers of) such verbose writers my simple narratives could not have much of an appeal. It is only your insistence that has made me wield the pen for *Makhzan*."

Truer light on his hesitation to write for the journals is thrown by his significant remarks in the same letter that "I am a non-cooperator and ideas of non-cooperation revolve in my head, aching to be expressed. My stories too echo these ideas. And they have little chance of publication in the so-called literary journals."

Stories echoing the non-cooperation movement, written during or immediately after his stay in Kanpur, included *Laag Daant* which was also published by the Hindi Pustak Agency of Calcutta as a booklet. It reflected the temper of the days of *satyagraha*. Two brothers who are sworn enemies of each other, are responsible for dividing the village into two cliques. They must always be on opposite sides. One joins the nationalists, the other the toadies. The nationalist becomes a popular leader, and the other is jealous. He too wishes to compete, and joins the nationalists, forgetting the enmity publicly. A stage comes soon when it is difficult to decide who is more popular.

*Vichitra Holi* shows how the Holi festivities bring out the true character of a British civilian who rushes to beat up his servants, and that of a well-to-do Indian friend who opposes the nationalist movement and curries favour with the British rulers. The Indian friend of the British civilian becomes so disgusted at the affront that he runs away from the scene and finds his place

among the ranks of the nationalists who are organising community festivities. He now disowns his connection with the British.

*Dussahas* narrates how the alcoholic agent of a zamindar is annoyed when the nationalist volunteers who propagate the boycott of the local liquor shop, do not allow him to buy a bottle. The agent, accompanied by companions who assemble at his daily sessions, goes to the shop and, with the help of the police, forces his way through and gets a bottle. His companions, however, are affected by the jeering of the crowds and take a vow not to drink. Back home, they refuse to drink with him. He drinks alone but does not relish it. In disgust he breaks the bottle and gives up drinking.

*Suhag ki Sari* is an echo of the times when, as part of the freedom struggle, the British-manufactured cloth was not only boycotted but also made a bonfire of. While the volunteers going round to collect foreign clothes are knocking at the gate of a respectable citizen who is also a leader, he asks his wife to throw out all foreign clothes. After a good deal of persuasion, she agrees and hands over all the clothes except one sari which she is not prepared to part with at any cost. This is because the sari symbolises the success of her married life—literally, a long life to her husband. While she insists on keeping it, the husband is insistent on keeping his pledge that nothing foreign would be kept in the house. After a long discussion, the sari is given away and burnt. The wife now feels sad and remains glum. The idea that the symbol of her happiness in marriage is gone, troubles her. The husband knows this and takes her out for a few months. This does not help. Her fears and doubts are, however, removed when two of her former servants tell her that ever since the day her “suhag ki sari” was made a bonfire of, their luck had turned the corner and the market set up by the husband was a thumping success.

In addition to writing short stories and finalising his *Prem-ashram*, Premchand is reported to have written a pamphlet *Swarajya ke Fayade* for the Hindi Pustak Agency, Calcutta. He also wrote his first drama. To write one had been his ambition even at Gorakhpur. In a postscript to a letter to Nigam he asked him for a copy of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. And shortly before he resigned his job, he told Taj that work on his proposed drama had been held up owing to his preoccupation with his

novel. "The plot," he told Taj, "is ready and the drama will be in four acts and have at least fifteen or sixteen scenes. Whether I succeed or not, is in the hands of God."

He got down to it while at Kanpur, but even as late as in February 1922, he told his friend that he was "still at it." By this time, however, differences between him and Kashi Nath had led to unpleasantness.

"I have never been so unhappy in my life as in the Marwari School," he told Nigam, "and I really don't know how I fell out with Kashi Nath."

"This wretched Kashi Nath is out to harm me," he told his wife, "and I do not know what to do."

"How long can you bear all this harassment? Please resign. We shall go back to the village."

"But how are matters different there? We must have money from somewhere."

"When you resigned from government service, there was little likelihood of a job in the Marwari Vidyalaya."

"But it is very difficult to make a living out of writing in this country."

"We shall cut down our needs and live on a smaller amount. When Kashi Nath doesn't want you to continue, how long can you bear him?"

"If you think this way and are prepared for the hardships, I am prepared to resign."

"Yes, please do resign. We ought not to be absolute slaves to our needs."

Premchand resigned his job. His colleagues and pupils felt sad that he had to go and prepared to arrange a farewell party in his honour. But Kashi Nath took exception to the idea as an affront to himself. Despite his hostility, however, they organised a meeting and gave a farewell address to Premchand. As a consequence, we are told, four or five teachers were sacked and about 25 to 30 students had to leave the school.

A glimpse of the differences between Headmaster Premchand and Manager Mahashe Kashi Nath, which led to the former's resignation, and the demonstration by the pupils of their affection and esteem for him, can be had in a short story entitled *Prerana* which Premchand wrote later. "All sorts of allegations were laid against me," says the hero. "Why did

I refuse to send up so and so for the examination? Why did so and so get the scholarship? Why was so and so left out? Why is so and so teacher not given so and so class? All this was unbearable. I had never suffered such treatment before. I just resigned."

Luckily for Premchand, Shiv Prasad Gupta, a great philanthropist and social worker of Banaras, sent him an assurance that should he like to return to Banaras, something could be done for him. He could do some work for the Gyan Mandal\* which was bringing out the then recently-started daily *Aaj*, and had also taken over the *Maryada*. Their editor, Shri Sampurnanand, had now been imprisoned in connection with the non-cooperation movement. Premchand wound up his affairs at Kanpur, left his family with his brother-in-law at Allahabad, and returned home. Instead of staying at Lamhi, however, he decided to stay at Banaras itself. The address given in his correspondence at this time is Asha Bhavan, Kabir Chaura, Banaras, where apparently he and his stepbrother Mahtabara, who also worked for the Gyan Mandal, stayed.

When Shri Sampurnanand returned from jail in July 1922 and took over the work then being done by Premchand, Shiv Prasad Gupta got Premchand fixed up at the Kashi Vidyapeeth as incharge of the (high) school section. His assignment was independent and there was little interference. "There are few worries here at the Vidyapeeth," he wrote. "Worries at the Gyan Mandal were also few, but the work at the Vidyapeeth entails national service with few worries."

At the Vidyapeeth, it appears, the subjects which Premchand taught were history and geography. These he taught well. Geography, as he taught, appeared interesting.

While the headmaster of a school at that time generally ap-

\*Nigam wrote in *Zamana* that Premchand got an assignment as the Editor of *Maryada* on one hundred and fifty rupees a month, and that he edited the journal for close on a year and a half. Confirmation of this statement is not available. Files of *Maryada* do not seem to indicate Premchand's name as Editor, and Sampurnanand who, according to a note in *Maryada*, resumed the editorship on his release from prison, remained in prison only for six months or so, i.e. from December 1921 to July 1922. What appears more likely, therefore, is that Premchand did some work for the Gyan Mandal publications, including *Aaj* and *Maryada*, which carried his short stories and articles, especially *Aaj*.

peared to be a terror, in Premchand's case this feeling was absent. This indeed was his greatest quality. If a student went to him with an indifferent essay or an article even after the school hours, he would listen to the student intently and give his suggestions.

While he devoted his prescribed time to teaching and supervising the work of the school, we are told, there was seldom a day when he came to the school without a copy of one English novel or another. If there was a period when he did not have to take a class, he would read the novel and then think about it. He was so lost in weaving out the plots of his novels or his short stories that anyone who went to him found him in the condition of an "opium eater" or a daydreamer.

It was indeed a matter of regret to the students of the Vidya-peeth that, owing to differences with the Vidyapeeth authorities, he decided to resign his job.\*

\*Nigam's suggestion that Premchand resigned only because he felt that the salary of Rs. 135 that he drew was too heavy a burden for the Vidya-peeth, does not appear plausible.

## Sangram: the First Drama

PREMASHRAM, PUBLISHED BY Premchand's friend and publisher, Mahavir Prasad Poddar, who was connected with the Hindi Pustak Agency, early in 1922, was acclaimed by critics for its "realistic portrayal" of the rural Indian society, without taking recourse to faked romances or imaginary tortures. "The author is fully conscious of his duty as a writer," said one. Another one, Prof. Ramdas Gaur, who had written appreciatively about his *Sevasadan*, praised *Premashram* in his Foreword, dated Holi, March 1922, to the novel. "Those who have read Bankim Chandra Chatterji's novels in Bengali," he wrote, "would agree with us unhesitatingly that, in his portrayal of the characters of *Premashram*, Premchand has gone far ahead of Bankim Babu. Whereas Bankim is verbose, Premchand has cleverly effected an economy of words—and his method of effecting economy is his own."

"When the future historians of India write about the unwritten record of the life of Indian peasantry," according to Prof. Gaur, "they will have to give credit for a true, almost photographic, portrayal of their lives to Premchand. Although he is a non-cooperator, he is not a partisan even when portraying the true emotions of those who are his opponents. He is a faithful chronicler of the mental processes of his characters. His characters are not idealists. In fact, he has portrayed truly the lives of the people, poor as well as the rich, the zamindar and the tenant, as also the bureaucrat—in other words, all those who form part of the nation—and their true physical and mental conditions."

Premchand's literary fame was spreading fast. The sale of *Premashram* beat all previous record of his books—some 1,000 copies by July 1922. He was emboldened to tell Nigam: "I feel that before I settle down to a life devoted to literature, I must publish another good novel, and yet another collection of

short stories." The novel referred to, as we shall see, was *Ranga-bhoomi* and his collection of short stories *Prem Pachisi* (Hindi). Before their publication, however, he wrote a drama—*Sangram*—and did a translation into Hindi of one of Anatole France's novels, namely, *Thais*.

While *Sangram* was published by the Hindi Pustak Agency, Premchand's *Ahankar*, the translation of Anatole France's *Thais* into Hindi, was published by the Burra Bazaar Kumar Sabha of Calcutta. This 226-page book, priced at only half a rupee, was the fourth in the series called "Sulabh Sahitya." In the preface to the Hindi version of this novel, Premchand praised the (original) work as one which appeared to be a lovely one from all angles. "I have no hesitation in saying that I have not seen another great book of this standard in the English language." *Saraswati's* reviewer differed and wondered whether the writer had really seen some unique angles in the "original" (French) version.

*Sangram*, Premchand's little drama, was only a further projection of the problems posed in *Premashram*. Says one of the peasant characters in the drama: "Until the time we get *swaraj*, our conditions won't improve." The tenant cultivator in this drama, as in *Premashram*, is shown to be at the mercy of the zamindar and his agents fully supported by the police who tyrannize over the cultivators, and other wings of bureaucracy. The drama heightens the contrast between the life of the peasant and that of the bureaucracy and the huge army maintained by a foreign government under whose aegis even the petty officials live like kings, spend six months in the year at hill stations, each one attended upon by ten to fifteen servants, and living in houses with compounds as big as an entire village. It exposes the powers exercised by petty police officials who can damn the biggest in the area by whispering into the ears of the British bosses that so and so is organising *panchayats* and is secretly working for the attainment of *swaraj*. Such being their powers, they terrorize the poor peasants, order search of their houses and take away what they like. The zamindars, with the support of police officials and impostors parading as *sadhus*, exercise undisputed sway. Sabalsingh, the village zamindar who is otherwise kind and is respected in the village, is attracted to the peasant Haldhar's wife, Rameshwari, and gets the husband arrested



and jailed on fake charges. He takes hold of the woman and keeps her in a separate house in the town. His fall leads to suicide by his own wife and jealousy with the brother, Kanchansingh, each one thirsty for the blood of the other—all for a woman who is the wife of one of the tenants. Haldhar, who is released when others in the village pay off the fine, decides to murder the zamindar; for, in his philosophy of life, “one whose wife is taken away and is not provoked into a determination to murder the culprit, is no man; he is a eunuch.” There is the sadhu Baba Chetandas who preaches one thing and practises another. All his preachings are a fraud on the people. He entices a married woman who is so ashamed of herself that she commits suicide. He believes that “it is the duty of a *Kshatriya* to wage a battle for land, wealth and woman, all of which are for the man who can take them through force and might. And in this battle, all thoughts of piety, *dharma*, enlightenment, prestige and status are tantamount to cowardice.”

The drama shows the results which lust leads to. Sabalsingh whose wife commits suicide, falls in the estimation of the people—indeed of himself—for there is questioning within himself over his moral degradation.

The drama ends on the theme of a change of heart. Sabalsingh, like Mayashankar in *Premashram*, repents before his tenants, transfers all his lands and all his wealth to them and goes on a pilgrimage. While renouncing everything, he makes a long speech before the people on the evil system under which the landlords levy exactions, and also how the zamindari system supports the British rule in India.

The theme of *Sangram* is so close to that of *Premashram* that one is somewhat intrigued why Premchand preferred to dramatise it. According to Premchand, the plot of the story was such as would lend itself to treatment only through a drama. According to *Saraswati's* reviewer, however, “even though we cannot refute the author's view, we are convinced that, if he had wished, Premchand could have written it as a novel.” From the angle of the audience, the drama “does not have enough incidents and scenes. Whether or not the audience is satisfied, it does have enough material to entertain the readers. For entertainment, this drama is as good as any of his novels. The characterisation of several persons has been very cleverly done.”

The emphasis of Premchand's short stories also shifted to the weaker sections of the society—the poor tenants, widows, *harijans*—and their problems and sad plight.

*Vair ka Ant* is woven round a family feud in which a young man sues his uncle for his father's share in the ancestral land and wins the case at enormous, rather ruinous, cost. The land which is actually transferred to his father's sister, in whose name he has fought the case, slips out of his hand because the aunt turns dishonest. On the uncle's death, however, the youngman feels distressed and wishes to help his cousins. "Enmity ends with the death of the enemy and is not inherited by the enemy's children."

*Lokmat ka Samman* is built round the life of a village washerman who has to bear the brunt of free and forced labour for the zamindar's agent and his half a dozen *chaprasis*. This is too much for him, and, whenever there is delay in returning the laundry, the *chaprasis* are angry and threaten to make his stay in the village impossible. They allege that the delay in returning the clothes is because of his giving their clothes on hire, or obliging his friends. The *dhobi* whose dealings have always been honest, is hurt and leaves the village to go to Patna where he builds up a good business and takes to new ways, fashionable clothes and alcohol. One of his patrons and neighbours once persuades him to lend him some gaudy clothes for a wedding party. The wearer of the borrowed clothes, however, is questioned by the real owner who says that the *dhobi* is so honest that the wearer must have taken them from someone who had stolen them. The *dhobi*, without the knowledge of the real owner, is hearing this conversation and he takes a pledge never to lend the clothes of his customers to others, no matter what the consequences. He thus refuses to do anything wrong even when he himself is in difficulty in getting some money for the betrothal of his son.

*Aabhushan* highlights the evil consequences of a woman's love for ornaments. Vimal's pretty wife, Sheetala, is piqued when she sees rich Suresh Singh's ugly but bejewelled wife, and curses her husband for his inability to get her ornaments. The husband is forced to go far away to Calcutta and Rangoon to earn money to buy her ornaments. Meanwhile, Suresh, who is after beauty, comes to dislike Mangala, his wife, drives her out of his house,

and starts visiting Sheetala and sends her Mangala's ornaments. Sheetala is now very happy. She bedecks herself with ornaments. A little later, Vimal, having saved five thousand rupees, returns home but with shattered health, to find his wife extremely happy and in full blossom. He is perturbed and goes to his mother's room instead of his wife's. The wife shows neither any concern for him nor attachment. She visits him only when Suresh comes to visit his friend, her husband. Seeing the husband on deathbed, she gets alarmed and expects Suresh to come to her aid now. But Suresh, in the meantime, has sized up the situation and comes to the conclusion that the important thing for happiness is not beauty but devotion and love. Having eaten the humble pie, he sends for Mangala.

*Kaushal* shows how a woman's love for ornaments can make her use her wiles to hoodwink the husband. The story's heroine, whose husband does not agree to buy her a necklace, borrows one from a neighbour, shows it to the husband and quietly returns it. At the dead of the night she shouts that a thief has entered the house and robbed her. The husband has to work in his spare time to "replace" it, in other words, to give the necklace to the wife who now tells him that she had played a ruse.

*Nairashya Leela* highlights the sad plight of a child widow whose parents provide recreation for her. It invites comments from the neighbours and public. Her attention is diverted to religious pursuits and she decides to become a *sanyasin*. This too brings public odium. She is made in charge of a school and gets attached to a child who is gravely ill. The father sees to it that the school is closed down. She hates the mention of the word "public opinion" and refuses to observe the fast on Teej day. The parents are perturbed. They know of no way to divert her attention without inviting "public criticism."

*Gupta Dhan* shows how a rich and exacting brick-kiln owner turns dishonest after the dying mother of one of his employees in whom he has taken great interest, confides in him the secret of a family treasure hidden closeby. The woman, a widow, had lost trace of the paper and it was just before she was dying that she had discovered it. She wants him to get this treasure and give it to her son, still a minor. The man turns dishonest, searches the treasure without telling the real inheritor about it, and dies. So dies his son who, however, has been able to trace it.

*Har ki Jeet* combines the themes of *Silai-i-Maatam* and *Seva Marg*. Out of his two pupils, a professor prefers the richer and steadier one to the more brilliant, for his daughter's hand. There is, however, delay in arranging the marriage. In the meantime the richer pupil, now a taluqdar and member of the Assembly, is attracted to a girl of his own class and woos her. To mislead the professor's daughter he writes to her that he has got tuberculosis. This brings the girl to him. She attends on him and is truly devoted to her beloved. There is conflict in the youngman's mind. The devotion impresses not only him but also the taluqdar's daughter who tells the youngman that her rival's devotion was unparalleled and, therefore, she would herself get out of the way so that the youth may really be happy in his married life.

*Tyagi ka Prem* shows how a so-called philosopher-cum-public leader gives a child to a school mistress working in a school being managed by him and does not own it. He does not agree to marry her because of the fear of public comment. He, however, continues to live in sin. His mistress commands more respect than himself.

*Baudam* highlights the derision incurred by an honest person who, by insisting on doing the correct thing, helping one and all in difficulty, goes against the current and is jeered at. The good samaritan, however, goes along his own way despite the derision, and he has the sympathy of the narrator.

Many of these and earlier stories were reproduced in *Prem Pachisi* (Hindi) published by the Hindi Pustak Agency of Calcutta in 1923.

**TWO IMPORTANT EVENTS** during Premchand's stay in Banaras at this time appear to have been the construction of a house in Lamhi and the setting up of a printing press which proved to be a white elephant and, as we shall see later, led to the financial ruination of Premchand and hastened his death.

Nigam, it seems, advised Premchand against going into the printing business and urged him to devote himself wholeheartedly to writing. But Premchand was keen to start a venture which could guarantee him a steady income.

Location of the press on Madhyameshwar Road seems to have been decided upon because it was very close to the Gyan Mandal Press where Mahtabrai worked, and also close to Asha Bhavan, the place where Premchand stayed. In addition to the help of Mahtabrai, Premchand also got the guidance of Chhabi Nath Pandey who was then Manager of the Aaj Press.

The press was christened by Nigam as Saraswati Press, and Premchand invested Rs. 4,500 of his own, Rs. 2,000 of his stepbrother Mahtabrai, and Rs. 2,250 of his cousin Baldevlal. Excepting the Rs. 2,000 share of poet Raghupati Sahai Firaq (who invested the amount a few months later), the press thus was a family concern. Premchand, of course, had to invest more than the total of his stepbrother's and his cousin's. As he devoted time to writing, he had to leave the management of the press to Mahtabrai who had been working at Gyan Mandal, and went on investing more and more, either in cash or by re-investing the income from his books.

Mahavir Prasad Poddar, in the meantime, had set up the Gita Press at Gorakhpur, and Premchand asked him to give some work to the Saraswati Press. "It is possible that we may get some work from him," Premchand wrote to Mahtabrai from Gorakhpur. "On my way back, I shall go to Allahabad and will try to bring Hindi type. You should, however, understand that all this

is being done on the understanding that you have to bear the main burden. You will have to be oblivious of all ideas of personal losses. No business yields profit in the initial stages. One works only in the hope of profits later on. You should take this press to be your own, and so long as it yields just enough for your own needs, there is no need for you to pay myself or cousin Baldevlal. Nor shall we ask for it. If the work expands, there would be a possibility of employment for the children.

"I definitely want to undertake publishing business and propose to start with an investment of Rs. 1,000. You will be entitled to one-fourth of the profits. With the one-fourth share in the press, wouldn't you have, in a year or two, at least Rs. 50 p.m.? If you have a subsistence allowance of Rs. 60 p.m. out of the capital, until the time the press is able to yield more, I am sure you will have no objection. For the time being, obviously, you'll be losing Rs. 40 p.m. But who can say that in three or four years' time, we shall not start having a profit of Rs. 200 p.m. from the press, and another Rs. 200 p.m. from the publishing business! You will not only become independent, but also make provision for the future. I am saying all this because, although it is easy to get a hired man for Rs. 50 p.m., a hired person will not take as much interest as one will take in one's own.

"If the type is received before July 1, you should get ready to resign your present job. Don't please be misled by what the women say. The sooner we start this work the better. . . . I may go to Kanpur from here (Gorakhpur), and may take a few days to return. . . . Please go to the press at least once every day, and make arrangements for a hand press and a rack. You need entertain no fears of the Gyan Mandal."

He visited Kanpur and Allahabad and told Nigam: "Last Sunday I went to Allahabad and saw two machines. One of them was good. The price was Rs. 3,000. But people advised me against going in for it. On my return here (Banaras), I came to know that here itself, there is a press for sale. I am now negotiating for it. There are no machines, but there are two presses and also miscellaneous equipment. Let's see how the negotiations proceed. I am sure of some job work. I am also planning to bring out a series of books priced at eight annas each. Perhaps one such book would come out once every two months. And I shall get Rs. 400. This will meet all the expenses of printing, etc.

I feel that the prospects of good job work here are not many, but there is ample publishing work."

Four days later: "The press will start from 20th July. I am left with nothing. The estimated expenditure was Rs. 8,000. I have spent Rs. 500 over and above this. Whence should I get more? I have no other recourse but my friends. I borrowed Rs. 400 from another friend. If you could send me Rs. 300, my burden would be lightened for a month. In about a month's time, I hope, there may be some earning. It is also possible that by that time Raghupati Sahai's plot of land may be sold and he'll give me money. With the idea of not imposing any burden on you, I had even suggested that you may kindly give me Rs. 100 p.m. so that I could defray the house rent. I can imagine your difficulties because I know that on repairs to the house you will have spent a lot. But my house also is still incomplete (it is just enough for habitation). It will take another Rs. 1,000 for it to be completed. And I have postponed the work of completion to better times. I feel ashamed to ask you again and again for some money. In fact, I postponed writing to you for money so long as I could somehow manage. But I am helpless now. If you don't assist me I'll have to go for a loan because there is no other way out. But then, why should I try to impress on you the gravity of my immediate needs? You are aware of my financial position and you can very well imagine all this. I had hoped for something more from you on an occasion like this. Please do not disappoint me. You know my wife's brother. I did not hesitate writing to him, even though there was little help to come. My letter was not acknowledged even."

The press, when it started functioning, seems to have had ample work. But it was mismanaged and incurred losses. There was even talk of closing it down or selling it off. "To sell it," Premchand wrote to Nigam, "would mean a loss of several thousand rupees. And I do not really know what to do in the circumstances. If I tell our creditors to have patience for a year, they tell me that if, despite the fact that the press was fully engaged, it did not make any profit this year, what could happen during the next? . . . I do not wish to get tied down to the press and don't have enough money to pay off everybody else so as to take over the entire work on myself. I was never cut for

business. And whenever I have tried to enter this field, it has been a battle against Fate. The result is too obvious. I wish you came down here and detected the defect which was responsible for the losses. So far as I am concerned, I am an ignoramus in this field. Till now I had left the management to Babu Mahtabrai. But he is thoroughly dispirited and is in search of a job. When one of my own family could not make it a success, how can one expect success from a paid employee? It is probable, therefore, that either I run the press or sell off everything and close down this business. Here I cannot hope for a fruitful consultation with the proprietors of other presses. In fact, they will laugh at our lack of business acumen. To keep quiet in the circumstances, therefore, appears to be the course of wisdom.

"I do not depend upon the press for my subsistence. But having invested five thousand rupees in it, it is not possible for me to remain contented and see it being cut through. If I had invested the amount in a bank, I would have got at least twenty-five rupees a month. By starting the press, I thought I would get at least fifty. And what a profit I am making! I do feel, nevertheless, that the press can still yield some profit. For this, I need an experienced adviser. I am thinking of consulting Pandit Shiv Narain Misra and asking him to come here."

Fed up with its running in loss he asked Mahtabrai to hand over the management of the press to him. While Mahtabrai got a job on Rs. 100 p.m. and lived with Premchand—who at times had to cook food for both—Premchand engaged himself in the business of printing. Demands from the creditors mounted and Premchand got deeper and deeper into the morass of the press.

He told Mahtabrai who wanted his investment back: "You asked me for some money, and I had to plead helplessness. As you know, I got types worth Rs. 1,500 for the press. That amount has not yet been paid. It is with great difficulty that, after meeting the current expenses of the press, I am paying off the outstandings on account of the type. I am also paying Rs. 600 you had taken from Nandkishore and interest to Babu Harinath. I am also paying every month the rent for the old house. Despite all this, I am keen somehow to help you and, if I am able to arrange for it, I'll certainly pay you Rs. 180 somehow or the other. But you have left the press in such a mess that I can



devote my time to nothing else. . . . My condition is very bad indeed. May God give you a long life. You do have Tej Bahadur to help you. Whom can I look up to? How can the press, after all, yield in five months enough to meet the investment of fifteen hundred rupees on type, a hundred rupees on the rent of the premises, of five hundred rupees to Nandkishore, Rs. 50 to your mother, Rs. 50 to Shiv Nandan Prasad Mata Prasad, and then to provide me—and you—with a subsistence allowance? I do certainly wish that each one of us should get something, but wishes are not all. You may rest assured that before the end of the year, I shall pay you the interest as per promise.”

During the next few months, Premchand’s condition went from bad to worse. “The press has harassed me so much that I am fed up,” he told Nigam. “It was indeed a very unlucky moment when this idea of a press came to me. I send you herewith the list of my creditors. A glance at this will enable you to imagine my difficulties. I have to go Rs. 2,272, and nobody knows how long it will take to realise it. As against the outstandings, I have to pay Rs. 500 for type, Rs. 400 for paper and Rs. 200 as rent for the premises. I don’t know when I shall realise the various outstandings. My creditors, however, won’t allow me to rest.”

Premchand had undertaken the publication of four books, including his *Karbala* and *Man Modak* (editor),\* with a hope to tide over the difficulties. But “against all hopes, not one of them is ready yet. I had calculated that, if they were ready before September-October, the stringency of money would be over. But all my hopes have melted into thin air. Neither the books are ready, nor have the bills been realised. In fact, the outstandings have been going up every month. I am now trying to negotiate with some booksellers who could remove the entire stock of books at cost price and pay me cash down so that I may pay off my debtors, and realise the outstandings gradually. Of this, I know, Rs. 500 would be bad debts. God alone knows that I am not putting up excuses. And why should I? I landed myself in trouble and created difficulties for my own self. Otherwise, I had plenty to keep me alive. In this harassment, I have not been

\**Man Modak*, published by Saraswati Press about this time, was full of mistakes which could not be forgiven, specially because it was meant for children.

able to do any literary work whatsoever. To rid the press of the debts and of job work, I am now thinking of bringing out the Hindi version of *Hamdard* weekly. But that also needs money. Let's see what God has in store for me."

When the losses incurred by the press piled up, Premchand had to think of getting a job again. The idea of joining *Zamana* was again mooted. But *Zamana's* adverse financial position—and Premchand's obvious requirements—made it difficult for him to be taken on the staff. "I am sorry to hear," Premchand himself wrote to Nigam, "that the *Zamana* had to suffer a loss again. Maybe, it has become impossible for good journals in Urdu to keep alive. I don't know the reason for it. Urdu readership is by no means small. Possibly, all Urdu readers wish to get the journals free. All of them claim, anyway, to be writers—yes, they are all writers—and not readers."

Other avenues too were explored. Bishan Narain Bhargava of the Navalkishore Press of Lucknow, who had started the *Madhuri* in July 1922, seems to have promised to do something for Premchand, but there was no further development. "I haven't yet heard from him about the proposal," Premchand wrote to Nigam. "In fact I have written to him twice, but there has been no reply from him. I have, therefore, to understand that the offer arose out of the effervescence of the rich. Such then is the fickle-mindedness of the wealthier classes; while he wanted me to communicate the decision to him telegraphically, he himself is not prepared even to acknowledge my letter."

The burden of the press, indeed, was too heavy. "I am being crushed under it," he told Mahtabrai, "and I don't really know how I would pass the rest of my life. I think I must take up a job."

And it was not long before he accepted one—that of a literary assistant on a hundred rupees a month—with the Ganga Pustak Mala of Lucknow, whose proprietor, Dularelal Bhargava, also edited the *Madhuri* for the Navalkishore Press of Bishan Narain Bhargava. In fact, Dularelal Bhargava did the editing of the journal from his office of the Ganga Pustak Mala at 29-30 Aminabad, Lucknow.

While Premchand continued to work for the Ganga Pustak Mala—which incidentally, published his *Azad Katha* (1926) and his next major novel, *Rangabhoomi* (January 1925), and seems

to have also taken over the stocks of *Karbala*—his press in Banaras continued to cause headache. For, while the work in the press seems to have come to a standstill, creditors continued to chase him. Mahtabrai, his stepbrother, now wished to start a druggist's shop and wanted his investment to be returned to him. Premchand obviously had little left to meet this and similar other demands from out of his own resources and wrote to Mahtabrai: "I have delayed replying to you because I was thinking of what to write. Anyway I shall pay you a thousand rupees this month. I am afraid, however, that there are too many druggists' shops in Banaras and yours may not be a success. You will have to be at the shop from eight o'clock in the morning till late in the evening. If, however, you wish to take up some premises on the main road, where you have the shop on ground floor and residential apartment on the first, it cannot be had for under forty to fifty rupees a month. I suggest, therefore, that you think it over again, lest you should lose all your money and have to have recourse to service again.

"In my view, you should return Baldevlal's money, and the two of us would become equal partners. We shall engage a proof reader, work wholeheartedly and produce good quality work. I'll undertake to secure job work, stay in Banaras and run the business. I shall myself publish the books that I write, and start a bookshop too. The press may have an average output of two formes a day. This, anyway, shall be our endeavour. If, however, you do not approve of this, I shall pay you a thousand rupees next May, and the remaining one thousand in August next when I hope to return to Banaras and stay there."

Again: "I like your proposal regarding the press immensely. I also wish the press were that of one person. When I told you to close it down, I meant that I would treat your investment as a loan on interest, pay you a part of it immediately and continue running the press. The question of selling it would have taken shape only after I also had given it a trial. Not before. I am glad you wish to own it, and would gladly advise you to do so. But you shall have to stay at Banaras (and not in the village) if you want the press to yield some profit. Till the time you produce two formes a day, it would not be enough. And if you spend all the time in meeting people, you cannot look forward to having a profit. If you stay at home, it would also mean a loss, or

at best a profit which would be just enough for you to live on. If two formes are printed in the press every day, there is no reason why you should not have adequate returns. Also there is no reason why you cannot print 4,000 sheets daily unless, of course, the press is being mismanaged. You should arrange to engage compositors on contract. They should compose, distribute the type and correct the first proofs. This is the arrangement in the Navalkishore Press here. The same is true of the Indian Press too. Anyhow, please work out how much has to be arranged for before August next.

"As you know, Baldevlal has to be paid Rs. 2,250 plus Rs. 270 as interest, the total being Rs. 2,520. Raghupati Sahai Firaq has to be paid Rs. 2,000 and Rs. 180 as interest, or a total of Rs. 2,180. The two amounts total up to Rs. 4,700. Have you made arrangements for this amount? . . . If you have, you must tell me clearly. (If I have to take over the press, I can arrange for the money only within a year's time.)

"You'll also have to pay me Rs. 5,175 (Rs. 4,500 plus interest for three years, i.e. Rs. 675). Thus, if you take over the press, you'll have to pay Rs. 4,700 plus Rs. 5,175 or a total of Rs. 9,875. If you leave me out, you'll have to pay Rs. 4,700 immediately. If you can arrange for this amount before August, please do so. But don't please be misled by false promises.

"I am also agreeable to the proposition that you return Baldevlal's money with interest. In this way, you and I shall become partners. Raghupati Sahai's investment shall be shown as loan on interest at twelve annas per hundred.

"If this proposition is acceptable to you, neither you nor I shall get any salary from the press. I shall work. So shall you. If I am unable to do my share of the work, I'll engage a person who will do proof reading and look after the managerial work, e.g. look to the attendance of the workers, etc.

"If none of these propositions is acceptable to you, you can pay off everybody and own the press. But don't please evade the issue on the pretext of inability to arrange for the money. Next August we'll have to come to a final settlement. Please think over the matter carefully before you reply to my letter.

"You asked Bhai Saheb for repairs to the house. The proposal is good only if we had the money. So long as we are unable to make some arrangement, additional expenditure

will lead only to further worries.”

Two and a half months later: “I also had proposed to you earlier that you and I should become equal partners in the press, and that we pay off all others. But you did not accept my proposal. If you can arrange for Rs. 3,225, I also can pay Rs. 1,000 to Raghupati Sahai. But all this must happen within this month. The present arrangements cannot continue beyond July. There must be some change for the better. What if you are unable to arrange for the money? If I give you the money, others too shall ask for theirs. For the time being, however, the question of payment to them is not the issue. Whom are you asking for the money? If you can sell your share of the press to anyone else I have no objection. When you yourself say that there is no possibility of income from the press, where is the possibility of keeping a paid manager? And if there is no salary to be paid, what can you do in the circumstances? And how will you live (without salary)?

“If there is some income, you will be entitled to no more than one-fifth share. If, thus, there be a profit of one hundred in a month, your share will work out at barely twenty rupees. The prospects of even this appear to be remote.

“(Another point.) When you haven’t been able to pay interest so far, from where will you pay interest on Rs. 3,225? In the absence of salary, you will be completely dependent upon profits from the press. What if there is no profit? I could have even agreed to let you have all the income every month. I consider that the present arrangements are a waste. I like hard work. Anyway, two courses are open to us: (1) You pay Rs. 3,225 to Raghupati Sahai and Bhai Saheb (Baldevlal) and I pay Rs. 1,000. We shall then become shareholders on a fifty-fifty basis and work for profit on our own—there is no reason why we should not get job work if our work is of quality; if I am there, we shall certainly get good deal of work. (2) If you are unable to arrange for the money, I should be empowered to run the press for a year. At the end of the year, either I show profits for everybody or if there is no profit, to discuss with every partner, close down the press and bear the losses patiently. These two alternatives are the only ones I can think of. If our press has Pica No. 2 and ordinary Pica and Great Primer types, there could be so much work

that the press would not be able to cope with. But these type faces require between one thousand and fifteen hundred. This we shall have to borrow. I shall come to Banaras before August 1. If possible, arrange for the money." He returned on September 1, 1925.

Such being Premchand's financial condition, it was not unnatural that he should turn down Daya Narain Nigam's invitation to go to Solan for a brief holiday, and tell him: "Whenever there is any thought of going out like this, I at once think of the members of my family—that I should be holidaying there and they suffer the heat here. Who does not feel the need for a little change? But only those who are well off can satisfy their desires. Those who are needy think of it and feel frustrated. That's what stops me. As it is difficult to take the whole family along with me, I will stay on here. A *khas* and a little ice worth half an anna or so a day, will ward off the inclemencies of the weather."

So trying were the circumstances then in which Premchand was writing his books, e.g. his drama entitled *Karbala*, his *Azad Katha* (the abridged Hindi version of Ratan Nath Sarshar's *Fasana-i-Azad*) and the finalisation of his great classic *Rangabhoomi*, and his novel *Kayakalpa*.

WITHIN A FEW months of the publication of *Premashram*, and while Premchand was still in Lamhi, he started his next novel, *Chaugan-i-Hasti*. The last novel to be written originally in Urdu, it was published first (as in the case of the others) in Hindi as *Rangabhoomi*.

While his earlier novels were the result of the time spared by his work as a teacher, this 1000-page long classic—the most voluminous of his novels—received Premchand's fulltime attention. Started on October 1, 1922, it was completed on April 1, 1924, and its Hindi version on August 12, that is, four and a half months later.

Some light on his devotion to work is thrown by his stepbrother Mahtabrai. Premchand, he says, was a light sleeper. Late one evening when he returned to his village home, Premchand's sleep was disturbed. When he asked Mahtabrai why he was so late, the latter replied that he had been delayed owing to discussions with some friends. Mahtabrai retired for the night and Premchand, it appears, got down to writing *Rangabhoomi*.

When, on the following morning, Premchand said to Mahtabrai that it must have been three o'clock in the morning when he returned home the previous night, Mahtabrai was surprised and said that it was only ten o'clock or so!

"You mean to say that I have been busy writing my novel since ten o'clock?"

"Obviously," said Mahtabrai, surprised that his stepbrother should be so oblivious of time. (There was no watch in the house.)

About this time Premchand got another child—a daughter. Born on March 3, 1924, she died in June of the same year, and made the father run from Lamhi to Banaras and back. A devoted worker, this distraction did not hamper his work on the novel.

Here it also seems necessary to mention that at the time Premchand wrote this novel, there was a controversy in

Banaras over the acquisition of land by government for the construction of a railway line and the industrial enterprises at Shivpur. The controversy seems to have added grist to Premchand's literary mill. And it is quite possible that it was this theme which assumed the mighty proportions of a classic, embracing the uprooting of villagers by the incursion of industry into the areas around big cities. In the background, of course, was the nationalist movement guided by Gandhiji who had cast his spell on Premchand, and the simmerings in the Indian princely States.

The central figure of the novel is a blind beggar, Surdas, who owns a plot used as village common land by all those inhabiting Pandepur. Industrialist John Sevak wants to acquire this land in order to build a cigarette factory. But Surdas is deeply attached to this ancestral plot of land and hopes to build a well and a *dharmasala* on this plot. For this purpose he saves five hundred rupees out of the alms he collects. With a deep imprint of Gandhian ideology, Surdas, a Harijan by birth, believes in *ahimsa* and the power of love to win over the opponents. He becomes the custodian of the welfare of the people of Pandepur. The establishment of a cigarette factory in Pandepur, he firmly believes, would lead to a break-up of village economy and establishment of liquor shops and brothels. The honour of women would be in danger, and the youth of the village would be driven to become mill workers and imbibe bad habits.

We first meet Surdas running after the carriage of industrialist John Sevak who insults him. John Sevak's attitude towards Surdas changes when he comes to know that the blind man is the owner of the plot of land that he has been wanting. He asks Surdas to sell his plot of land but Surdas refuses. A cigarette factory, he says, "can be built only on my dead body." John Sevak's stooges promise a high price for land. The offer seems attractive to others in the village and become hostile to Surdas who in practice is deeply religious. Industrialist John Sevak goes to church every Sunday but he hardly believes in religion. "If you don't know, you should know," he tells his son, "that religion is only a means to achieve your selfish ends. You may believe in Christ as the Son of God, or as a superman, but I have no such belief. I respect him only as an ordinary *fakir*." He tells Tahir Ali, his employee in the leather shop, that to inject religion into business is stupidity. "There is no relation-



ship between these two. To live in this world you must take recourse to business, not religion."

Surdas, on the other hand, is so noble that when Bhairon burns his hut and steals his savings totalling five hundred rupees, he does not believe it. And when Bhairon's wife, Subhagi, quietly restores it to Surdas, the latter goes and gives it back to Bhairon!

As against John Sevak's single-minded devotion to industrialisation and the establishment of a cigarette factory which, he says, would stop the flow of money to overseas, his daughter, Sophia, is a free-thinker. She reads books on Vedanta and Buddhism. Her refusal to attend the church on Sundays leads to differences with her devoutly Christian mother. Sophia leaves the house. She has not gone a long way off when she finds people engaged in putting out a fire (which in fact is a mock fire started by Samiti members for an exercise). She tries to save Vinay, a social and political worker, from the fire and gets bruised and faints. And it is in this state that she is taken to the house of Vinay's father, Kunwar Bharat Singh, whose daughter Indu was her friend and classmate. Sophia regains consciousness after four days. Her ideas and her quest for truth as also her learning, endears Sophia to all in Vinay's house and she is told that she is welcome to stay with the Kunwar's family.

But for Indu's husband, Raja Mahendra Kumar's opposition, she would have accompanied Indu to her in-laws' house. Meanwhile, Vinay falls in love with Sophia to the utter dislike of his mother, Rani Janhawi, who wants her son to be a great leader. She sends him away to be engaged in rural uplift work at Jaswantnagar near Udaipur in Rajasthan. And when she comes to know that Vinay exchanges love letters with Sophia, she is unhappy, and tells Sophia to write to him that the only relationship possible between them is that of a brother and a sister. (For, although she likes Sophia as an individual, she is unwilling to accept a Christian as a daughter-in-law.) She herself writes to him that Sophia is to be married to the local magistrate Clarke. This is a disappointment to Vinay.

John Sevak, meanwhile, assesses the value of Sophia's friendship with Bharat Singh's family and plans to cash in on it. He sells shares to Bharat Singh and by misrepresenting facts about a fracas involving his employee, Tahir Ali, enlists the support of

Kunwar's son-in-law, Raja Mahendra Kumar Singh, Chairman of the Municipality, to acquire Surdas' piece of land. He also mobilises all the forces of authority for the purpose. The land is acquired. There is, however, an agitation by Surdas and the villagers. To their rescue comes Sophia whose parents want her to marry Clarke, the British Revenue Collector. An admirer of Surdas, she first asks Indu to persuade Raja Mahendra Kumar but Indu is now jealous of Sophia who is being courted by Clarke. Sophia feels insulted. She then persuades Clarke to release Surdas' piece of land. This disappoints Raja Mahendra Kumar and makes him an enemy of Surdas and Clarke.

The Raja carries on propaganda in the press against Clarke and leads a deputation to the governor. As a result, John Sevak gets the land and Clarke is transferred to Jaswantnagar in Udaipur State, the scene of Vinay's work for rural development.

Meanwhile, Vinay, the Seva Samiti worker, teaches the people to help themselves. At his instance, villagers get together to drive away wild animals rather than seek police help, prefer to resolve their disputes through the *panchayat* rather than go to the court, and adopt measures of environmental hygiene instead of seeing rubbish piling up outside their houses. They also construct wells where none existed before. "A villager now lives not for himself alone, but for the community." And Vinay is surrounded not by his rivals and enemies but by friends and cooperators. He is respected by the people of the village, men, women and children, who all worship him and wish to have his *darshan*.

The other side of the picture is presented by an outlaw, Virpal Singh, who leads a terrorist group in Jaswantnagar and says that the princely ruler is a puppet in the hands of the British Resident. The ruler, he says, goes abroad to have a good time or accompanies the British Resident for *shikar* or attends on him. That's all. So far as he is concerned, it is immaterial what happens to his subjects. The real ruler in the Indian princely States is the British Resident who wants that there should be chaos. The plight of the princely rulers is worse than that of the accused in a case. "While the accused has a right to be heard, we have none. There is no appellate body for us and there is no law. There are no precedents. Any charge can be levied against us. And any sort of punishment can be imposed on us." "The British policy," says the Resident, "is to rule India for all times to come.

Whether it is the Conservatives in power, or Liberals, Radicals or Labour, Nationalists or Socialists, all are unanimous on this goal of British policy. . . . The British people have never been known for renunciation or for sacrificing their lives for high principles. Basically, we are all imperialists."

Vinay, now a popular leader, meets Virpal Singh at a deserted spot. The latter recognises him and gives him due respect. When he sees the police coming, he withdraws. As a result of the intelligence provided by a postal courier, who passes the night with the Seva Samiti leader, Vinay is arrested and imprisoned. Virpal secretly meets him and asks him to escape. But Vinay, an idealist, refuses. Sophia, who accompanies Clarke to Jaswantnagar, with the secret intention of getting Vinay freed, devises a stratagem to get him released. But Vinay refuses to leave the prison in this fashion. His misunderstanding regarding Sophia's matrimonial intentions vis-a-vis himself, however, is removed. The two promise to be for each other.

Hearing from Nayak Ram, who smuggles into the police ranks, that his mother is seriously ill, Vinay weakens and escapes from the prison. Before, however, he has proceeded to the railway station, he sees a crowd marching on the house of Clarke whose car has run over and killed a person in Jaswantnagar. At the head of the crowd is the outlaw Virpal Singh. Sophia's arguments with Virpal Singh are drowned in the din. Someone hits her with a stone. She falls down. Vinay's blood boils. With the pistol given him by Nayak Ram, he fires on Virpal Singh. This is followed by firing by the police. Vinay is hit. Virpal Singh, who is surprised at Vinay's "crossing over to the side of the State," takes Sophia away and enrolls her as a member of the terrorist gang.

Vinay searches for Sophia and joins the forces of the State to track down the terrorists. This makes him unpopular with the people. His mother writes to him that his actions have disappointed her, and that she is ashamed of him. She wishes he were not her son. With her mother angry, Vinay is disgusted with life. His chase for Sophia continues. Ultimately, however, Vinay succeeds in reaching the hideout of the terrorists. But Sophia hates him for becoming a part of the State administrative machinery of repression. Enamoured of the terrorists' activities, she spurns his offer and sends him away.

Vinay returns and tries unsuccessfully to persuade Clarke and the princely ruler to release prisoners so as to put an end to violence. After this, Vinay makes for his home and, by coincidence, runs into Sophia travelling by the same train. She is by then disillusioned of the terrorists' activities. The two feel reunited, detrain at a wayside station and stay with Bhils. She, however, does not allow him any liberties, despite his best efforts. He tries *tantric* spells and gets slightly close to her. The two then make for Banaras where he hopes to persuade his mother to allow him to marry Sophia. Rani Janhawi agrees, but Vinay's father and Sophia's mother have some reservations. Janhawi is too headstrong. Arrangements for marriage are set afoot.

Meanwhile, life in Pandepur has moved fast. Subhagi, who had restored the five hundred rupees stolen by Bhairon, her husband, is turned out of the house. She takes refuge with Surdas. This leads to a scandal against Surdas. Bhairon lodges a complaint with police and gets witnesses by bribing workers. Surdas, along with Subhagi, is arrested and convicted by Raja Mahendra Kumar. The villagers, who easily recognise the nobility of his character and his role in protecting the village land, raise funds, pay the fine, and get him released. To deprive him of the opportunity of public esteem, authorities release him suddenly. Surdas, gives three hundred rupees, presented to him by the villagers, to his "enemy" Bhairon to reconstruct his house burnt down in fire a few days earlier. Bhairon now appreciates the high moral character of Surdas.

Plans for the expansion of the cigarette factory, in the meantime, make headway. The youth of the village swell the ranks of the mill workers who bring "new values" to the village. Two of them enter the house to rape Subhagi. She shouts for help. Surdas protects her honour. The miscreants are arrested and convicted. This results in alienating the parents of the miscreants, who had till now adored him. Some youngmen take revenge on Surdas. He loses two teeth and is confined to bed.

Meanwhile, orders for the forcible acquisition of houses in Pandepur are passed. Opposition is put up by the villagers. Raja Mahendra Kumar pays compensation to the householders—one rupee to Surdas!

Surdas refuses to vacate his hut. His courage puts others to shame. Police wishes to turn him out forcibly. The police force

is strengthened. The issue has become one of prestige. There is firing. About a dozen people are killed. The funeral procession is joined by about 10,000 people. Tension mounts. City dwellers are told not to go to Pandepur. Clarke, who is now back in Banaras, is in charge of the situation. Surdas, carried on Bhairon's shoulders, tries to calm the crowd. Thinking that he is inciting the crowd to be violent against the police, Clarke fires at him and Surdas falls down. While the crowd runs helter-skelter, Sophia rushes Surdas to hospital. Vinay tries to pacify the crowd, but he is hooted down as a renegade who was not seen anywhere in Pandepur when his leadership was needed. Ashamed of himself and determined to set an example of how the sons of the rich can die in the cause of the common man, he takes out a revolver and shoots himself down. Appear Sophia and Janhawi—the mother is proud of the martyrdom of son who has become a hero. Surdas has no rancour. Asked by John Sevak if he could do anything, Surdas tells him to reinstate Tahir Ali who had been dismissed and imprisoned on a charge of corruption. John Sevak does not agree but promises to look after Tahir Ali's family.

Surdas' funeral procession is attended by all—not only his friends, but also his "enemies," including Clarke. Having lived a noble life, he has triumphed even in death. People, including Sophia and Raja Mahendra Kumar's wife, raise subscription to commemorate his memory by putting up his statue. Raja Mahendra Kumar, however, is opposed to the move. He is annoyed with his wife and forces her to leave his house. The municipal board adopts a motion of no-confidence in the Raja. Surdas' statue is installed. Someone, however, pulls it down while it is past midnight—it is none other than Raja Mahendra Kumar. The Raja is himself crushed under the statue.

Sophia's mother wishes her to marry Clarke. Sophia considers herself married to Vinay and commits suicide. Her mother, unable to stand the shock—her poet son having already gone abroad—goes mad. Her grandfather also dies because he is shocked at his son's extravagance. But John Sevak is not perturbed. He goes ahead with plans to expand his business of cigarette manufacture to Bihar also.

The boldest characterisation is that of Surdas, the Gandhi-like hero of this novel. According to his philosophy of life, we

are all players in a game on the playfield of life and are born to play. Victory or defeat is immaterial. Only one side can win. And defeat is a spur to further continuance of the game. "I have lost, you have won. I couldn't hold out. You are an experienced player. You don't lose breath. I do. My team was divided within. For you to clap on your victory is no part of the credo of a sportsman. . . . Let us rest a while. We shall try again and, learning from experience, we shall defeat you some day." Surdas was a true sportsman. There was never a wrinkle on his forehead; he never lost faith in himself; he never retraced a step. He was as happy in defeat as he was in victory.

Surdas stood for the same philosophy of life as did Premchand. This is borne out by the text of a letter which Premchand wrote in April 1923 on the death of a member of Nigam's family. "Illness and difficulties," he said, "are an essential part of life. The tragic death of the child, however, is a heart-rending event. The only way to bear it calmly is to take the world for a playground, or a stage, where only that man deserves applause who is neither flattered by victory nor depressed by defeat, i.e. one that would continue to play, irrespective of whether he is winning or losing. After a victory, it is but natural to make an effort to ensure that one is not defeated. After defeat, one naturally wishes to score a victory. We all play the game, yet do not know how to play it. If we score a victory or win a goal, the sky echoes with our cries of hip-hip-hurray, we throw up the hat in excitement, forgetting that no victory is permanent; for, it is just possible that we may be defeated in the next round.

"As, therefore, we don't know how to play the game, we lose heart if we are defeated, we weep and we push a few people around, play foul and lose all hopes as if we are not destined ever to win a round. A man such as this has no right to enter the playground. . . .

"Why should we at all think that Fate has let us down? Why should we have a grouse against God? Why should we get depressed at the thought that the world is hostile to us and that it takes away what is on our plate? Why should we get frightened at the thought that the robber is poised to deprive us of what we have? To view life from this angle is to lose mental poise. After all, it amounts to the same thing. What if the robber robs us? What if we lose everything that we have? The only differ-

ence between these two positions is that one is done forcibly, while the other is submitted too willingly. While the robber advances deliberately to rob others, defeat does not do so. When we play the game, we throw ourselves open equally to victory or defeat. To be robbed is not an everyday affair. It is an accident. Victory or defeat, on the other hand, is an everyday affair.

Whosoever enters the game knows fully well that he faces victory as well as defeat, and that, therefore, he should not get depressed at defeat, and also should not get elated at victory.

"Our duty indeed is to take part in the game, and to play it with all the heart in it, to try to escape defeat, but not as if it were something to be abhorred. After the defeat, i.e. after we fall down, we should get up, give our clothes a dusting and challenge the adversary. 'Well, let us have one more round.'

"If you behave like a sportsman, you would have great solace. I cannot, of course, say whether or not I shall reach the goal. Nevertheless, I can tell you that I shall never feel as sorry at such losses as I did a few years ago. I won't say that my life has been in vain and that I have achieved nothing, and that I hesitate to play the game so long as I live. You have played the game much longer than myself, and have seen victories and defeats. For an able sportsman like you, it is not necessary to blame Fate.

"Some play golf and polo; there are others who play *kabaddi*. All these amount to the same thing. One faces either victory or defeat in one or the other. He who wins a game of *kabaddi* also feels as much elated as do others.

"You should not take this defeat to heart. In fact, I think you have not taken it to heart. You are far more experienced than myself."

Whether or not some inferences should really be drawn from the parallelisms referred to above, *Rangabhoomi* can be counted as Premchand's second best novel. It was this piece of fiction, more than any of the previous ones, that established his reputation as the best novelist in Hindi. He was now being approached by different publishers. When one of them approached him with a request to allow him to publish this third (important) novel, Premchand frankly told him that, as his earlier works had been published by the Hindi Pustak Agency of Calcutta, left

to himself, he would have normally given this one also to the same publishers.

During a discussion with Dularelal Bhargava, however, he said, he had casually made a commitment from which he would not like to withdraw. Bhargava paid him for this novel a sum of Rs. 1,800 or four times the royalty on *Sevasadan* published six years earlier.

Four years after its publication, i.e. in 1928-29, the novel's author was awarded a prize of five hundred rupees by the Hindustani Academy for this work—it being the first ever prize to be awarded by the Academy.



## For Hindu-Muslim Unity

PREMCHAND HAD A passion for Hindu-Muslim unity, and was, therefore, critical of the fanatically inclined, be they the Muslim *mullahs* or Brahmin priests. It was from this angle that he viewed the policies pursued by the political parties.

Because of his advocacy of Hindu-Muslim unity, Premchand was bitterly critical of the movement for conversion from one religion to the other. "I strongly disagree with this movement," he wrote to Nigam, "and even though I have practically given up writing anything in Urdu, I am writing a short article against this movement for *Zamana*. It'll reach you in three or four days. The Arya Samajists will raise a hue and cry. I am sure, nevertheless, that you'd give it some space in *Zamana*."

The article, entitled "Malkana Rajput Mussalmanon ki Shuddhi," was published in *Zamana* of May 1923. Herein Premchand took up cudgels on behalf of the Muslims who deprecated the *shuddhi* movement launched by the Bharatiya Hindu Shuddhi Sabha, formed by several sections of the Hindu society, including the Sanatanists, the Arya Samajists, the Jains and the Sikhs. While Premchand agreed that the shuddhi movement had been originally started by the Muslims, the launching of the shuddhi movement by all sections of Hindu opinion to him signified a grave danger to the Muslims. They had not been afraid of the movement carried on by the Arya Samajists, he said, but apprehended danger in the combined opposition by all sections of the Hindus. There were many among the Muslims, said Premchand, who were leaving the Congress fold because, according to their thinking, Congress *raj* would now be synonymous with Hindu *raj*. This trend, Premchand thought, would, therefore, weaken the movement for *swaraj*. This being so, the movement which gave spiritual satisfaction to a few individuals, but hurt a large section of the people, should be called off. The Hindus, he added, were better educated, were politically

more conscious, and were greater patriots. Propagation by them of the shuddhi movement, when they had earlier opposed the movement launched by Muslims, was regrettable. Their policy in effect amounted to one of "retaliation." While the conversion movements during the Moghul rule were motivated by religious objectives, this shuddhi movement was basically political in character. It was indeed sad, he maintained, that people viewed problems from the communal angle rather than from the national angle: "Hindus thought of themselves as Hindus first and Indians next."

One of the aims of the movement was to ensure an increase in the Hindu population and a consequent reduction in the number of Muslims. "But numbers never prove anything. Wasn't England with a smaller population ruling the millions of India?" All that it might lead to was a few more seats for the Hindus in the legislative councils. This gain was hardly worth endangering Hindu-Muslim unity and the prospects of swaraj. Hindu-Muslim unity was the foundation of the movement for swaraj. It was a sad thing that the obsession of a few misguided religious bigots was posing a great danger to that foundation. "While I had full confidence in the wisdom of Hindus and was certain that no harm could come from them to Hindu-Muslim unity," the "first blow has been struck by the Hindus themselves."

Premchand posed a few questions to the advocates of shuddhi, e.g. why didn't they win over these sections of the Hindu society, the untouchables, who were being gradually converted to Christianity, and thus strengthen themselves? The contention of the advocates of shuddhi that the Malkana Rajput Muslims (from Tonk) had the same traditions, bore Hindu names, observed the same customs, worshipped the same deities, called Brahmin priests for the ceremonies, and did everything that the Malkana Rajput Hindus did—except burying their dead—meant nothing; what was more important was the entry in the old records. In conclusion, Premchand emphasised that Hindus' sense of tolerance was proverbial. "Now is the time for showing such tolerance; otherwise, it would be too late."

While Muslim readers praised the "liberal mindedness" of Premchand, there was criticism from the Arya Samajists. One of them, Sriram, M.A., in a rejoinder in the journal's issue of June 1923, wrote that Premchand who had been so lavish in

regard to tendering advice to the Hindus had said nothing to the Muslims who were determined that Hindu-Muslim unity or no unity, foreign rule or swaraj, they could not call off their shuddhi movement; that he had not raised his voice against the movement for conversion to Christianity; that he and the Congress were silent in regard to the Buddhist mission's activities in Malabar. "Is it only the poor Hindus whose activities arouse his ire?"

Opposition to the movement from among the Hindus, according to the rejoinder, came only from those people who were "obsessed" by political objectives, who had never bothered about the future of the Hindus and who as Hindus never had done anything for the Hindus. Referring to the plea of danger to Hindu-Muslim unity and the adverse effects of shuddhi on the Congress movement, the writer said: "Does work for the Congress imply any special obligation and favours to the Hindus? And does the Congress work for swaraj mean that it is done to make the Hindus feel grateful? If that is not so, why this threat?"

In conclusion, he pointed out that the Hindus engaged in political work should recognise that the weakness of the Hindus would weaken the country. "So long as the Hindus are weak, and the Muslims know that the Hindus are weak, Hindu-Muslim unity is meaningless."

Premchand was a great admirer of the two brothers, Mohammed Ali and Shaukat Ali. (The former was the editor of *Hamdard* for which Premchand wrote, and there seems to have been regular correspondence between the two.) "I consider the transformation in the ideas of the Ali brothers," he wrote to Nigam, "to be genuine. Only such conversion, shuddhi, can be lasting." The reference presumably was to the presidential address to the annual session of the Indian National Congress at Cacinada a fortnight earlier.

When, in the later days of the non-cooperation movement, the Swarajya group came into being and Nigam asked him which party he supported, Premchand wrote back: "I favour neither. This is because neither of the parties is doing any practical work. I am a member of the party to be, that is, a party which would undertake political education of the masses. The manifesto issued by the Khilafat party has my wholehearted support. The surprise, however, is that it has been issued by one party

only. Both the parties, I think, should have agreed on it." Premchand maintained that while the eminent leaders were in prison, the reactionaries, with the support of the British rulers, had strengthened themselves. Those who had been left behind in the non-cooperation movement utilised this opportunity to rehabilitate themselves through communal propaganda. The main blame lay on the shoulders of the candidates for the elections to councils.

Premchand's ideas, according to Nigam, corresponded to those of C. R. Das who too blamed the Hindus for rigidity in approach to the shuddhi movement and Hindu-Muslim unity.

Premchand was all praise for the sacrifices of and the ideas of swaraj as propagated by the Ali brothers on their release from prison. He compared their thoughts to those of Rama and Lakshmana, the highest praise that a Hindu could pay to the Muslim leaders.

In an article entitled "Qahat-ur-Rijjal" (or a famine of wise men), in *Zamana* of February 1924, Premchand wrote that in the light of the Muslim approach to the problem of Hindu-Muslim unity, the Hindu attitude was not above board. He felt sorry that the Hindus had not understood nor cared to understand the implications of the Khilafat movement. In fact, they had looked upon it with suspicion, and not from a wider angle—that of Gandhiji. The Maulana, he said, had equated swaraj with Hindu-Muslim unity and had given his all for the cause. "The attitude of the Hindus shows that the nation has gone bankrupt. If the Hindus had even one Kitchlew, or Mohammed Ali, or Shaukat Ali, the movement of the Hindu *Sangathan* or shuddhi would not have led to such heat." and would have resulted in the reduction of incidents that had taken place under their impact.

"It is, indeed, sad that even though the Congress as an organisation has not had anything to do with these movements, its individual members have left no stone unturned for the shuddhi movement. Not one of the top leaders of the Congress has openly raised his voice against these movements. . . . Even leaders like Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal Nehru, Bhagwandas and Sri Prakasa who, one hoped, had the moral conviction to come out with their views openly, expressed themselves one day against the movement, and contradicted their statements the next day."

Premchand could boast of his prophecy. In a letter dated September 30, 1924, he told Nigam: "The Hindu-Muslim riots are continuing. I had prophesied it, and what I had said is coming true, every word of it. The Hindu Sabha may create obstacles in reaching an agreement at Delhi. In Lucknow the provocative action was that of the Hindus; they committed excesses, but having done so, they disappeared from the scene." (Premchand at this time was working in Lucknow.)

What pained Premchand deeply was an attempt to divide the nation on communal lines. He was, therefore, happy whenever he saw attempts being made to bring the different sections of the Indian people together. With the idea of making the Islamic history and culture better understood by the Hindus, he himself wrote a drama, *Karbala*.

The drama, published by the Ganga Pustak Mala of Lucknow in November 1924, is built round the cruel death of Prophet Mohammed's son-in-law Hussain, his relatives and friends, at the battlefield of Karbala. That Premchand was deeply moved by the event is clear from the fact that in August 1922 he wrote to Nigam to send him a copy of the collection of elegies on the martyrdom of Imam Hussain at Karbala, which he had seen with Khwaja Saheb, the Manager of *Zamana*, and also published a longish essay on Karbala in the November 1923 issue of *Madhuri* of Lucknow.

Volumes had been written on the subject of the battle of Karbala by eminent Muslim writers, but there appeared to have been very little by Hindu writers. The exacerbated differences between the Hindus and Muslims, in fact, made it difficult for the Hindus to have an idea of the principal characters of Muslim history. It was for Premchand to cut new grounds in order to introduce the Hindus to the great men of Muslim history. For, to him, greatness was the important thing, the religion to which a person belonged was not.

In fact, the drama includes references to the presence of Hindu soldiery in the army of Hussain whose martyrdom creates the impact of tragedy on the reader. The language of this work, incidentally, is more Persianised.

Divided into five acts and further subdivided into forty-three scenes, the drama is built round the tragedy perpetrated at the battlefield of Karbala and is meant for being read and not staged.

While Hussain stands for the higher ideals of sacrifice and truth, Yezid is the very picture of lust for power and wealth. Hussain, however, is superhumanly idealistic. The drama has no female character worth the name, possibly because the inclusion of women in a drama of religious importance is disfavoured by the Muslims.

Mention should also be made of some of the stories woven round the themes such as the life of the Prophet and glimpses of the Muslim characters in Indian history.

*Nyaya* purports to be a chapter from the Prophet's life. His son-in-law, we are told, has not yet joined his new fold. When the Prophet's difficulties force him to undertake *hijrat*, the son-in-law is captured during a skirmish. He agrees to his wife being held as a hostage and is released. Back to his trade and his caravans, he finds that once his caravan is caught and he is to be tried. The Prophet who is trying everyone else, leaves the chair; for, he says, justice must not err and he should be the last person to disobey the laws prescribed by himself in favour of some one who is near to him. The son-in-law is so touched at the impartiality of justice that he joins the fold of his father-in-law, the Prophet.

*Rajyabhakta* recaptures the times of the nawabs of Lucknow just at the beginning of the nineteenth century when British intrigues at the court had taken a concrete shape. A court intrigue against Raja Bakhtavar Singh who was a loyal servant of the nawab and the country, leads to his house arrest. Afterwards, the British soldiers and the local deserters create chaos and rob the people. A stage comes when the life of the nawab himself is in danger from the British soldiers and their local stooges. Just at that time comes Bakhtavar Singh who risks his own life to pull the nawab out of the quagmire. The nawab now knows who is loyal to him and to the kingdom, and who is a deserter. Bakhtavar Singh regains his position of trust. The British Resident lets down the five accomplices and tells the nawab that he has complete authority to punish them, but they are not seen anywhere.

*Pareeksha* portrays Nadir Shah's contempt for the depravity of the Moghuls which had made them and their princesses and begums lose all sense of shame and honour. Ordered to present themselves and to dance before Nadir Shah, the princesses

and begums come and stand mutely. To test their courage, Nadir Shah feigns sleep, but none dares pick up the sword (that he has kept by his side) and thrust the steel into him. He is disappointed: "As there is not one among you, the descendants of Timur, who could stand up to protect her honour, this kindgom is doomed and its days numbered."

*Vajrapat* portrays the massacre of Delhi at the hands of Nadir Shah's soldiers, and shows how the conqueror manages to get the precious, world-famous diamond, the Mughal-i-Azam (Koh-i-Noor). The gem brings bad luck to his son, for, no sooner does he put it in his tiara at the court, than he is murdered before his father's very eyes. Nadir Shah ascribes bad luck to the diamond. A moving event is the effect on the conqueror of Delhi of a verse saying that you have killed so many that you must bring the dead back to life in order to carry on your mission of killing.

*Kshama* is the story of the times of the Arab conquest of Spain. A Christian leader is shown to give the invaders a stiff fight. Besieged, he quietly slips out of the fort. There is a prize on his head. Involved in a duel, he kills the only son of an Arab chief. Being chased from pillar to post, the Christian leader is forced to take shelter in the house of an old man who is none other than the father of the young man he has murdered. The old man, not knowing the identity of the fugitive, agrees to give him shelter. Told of the identity, he stands by his word, saves him from the wrath of those out to kill him, and gives him his own camel to enable him to escape. The Christian is impressed by the moral values of Islam which could make people behave in such a noble manner.

*Laila's* locale is Persia where there is a conflict between the king's love for the pied-piper type Laila and the conservative elements' insistence that the king send her away, even though in actual fact it is Laila who is responsible for several liberal measures that help the subjects of the king.

*Fatiha* which appeared a few years later, is a story wherein a tribal chief from the North-Western Frontier Province loses his infant son who is admitted into the orphanage and, subsequently, when he grows up, joins the army. He now fights against his own people, the tribals. He distinguishes himself and is the favourite of his Hindu boss, a colonel. Once he kills a chief and

is chased. While talking to his boss, he sees an Afridi woman. This woman is none other than the chief's daughter who had once saved the life of the colonel taken prisoner and held to ransom. To win her sympathy he tells her a lie that his wife was dead. The woman arranges his release. A few years later she leaves her parents and goes to the man to find that his wife is still alive. As the wife stands between her and him, she stabs her and chases the man who had let her down—without killing him, for she still loves him. A little later, the orphanage-bred soldier, Asad Khan, and she have a scuffle. Her eyes fall on a snake tattoo mark on his hand. She too had one. He is her lost brother, and she tells him that he had killed his own father. The story is hard to believe, but the available evidence shows that they are brother and sister. They search out the body of their father and recite *fatiha*, the requiem.

*Shatranj ke Khiladi* (or *Shatranj ki Baazi*) is a pen picture of decadent Lucknow in the last years of Wajid Ali Shah. It portrays the life of various sections of the urban community, all steeped in debauchery or useless pursuits like cock-fighting, kite-flying, etc. at a time when the British were making inroads into the kingdoms of Oudh and Lucknow. The principal characters are two nobles who devote all their time to playing chess. The game is in fact an obsession to them. They play to the exclusion of everything else. Indeed, their indifference to other things, including their families or the duties to the State, is startling. So, in fact, is their sense of values even though they can indulge in a duel in defence of the preservation of the name of the ancestors! While the British forces enter Lucknow and make Wajid Ali Shah a prisoner, the two nobles are still engaged in the game of chess!

Another story in a lighter vein is *Vinod*. It depicts how some students at college make fun of a simpleton. He falls a victim to a ruse played by them through letters supposedly sent by an Anglo-Indian girl who asks him to change his ways, his dress and his habits, and how he obliges her and even gives a farewell dinner to all of them, to be told how he has been fooled.

Premchand used the art of caricature to make fun of the vested interests who stood in the way of Hindu-Muslim unity. He exposed the hypocrisy of the so-called "leaders of religion"—the Brahmin priests and the Muslim *mullahs*.



*Satyagraha*, which echoes the non-violent struggle for freedom, caricatures the Brahmin priests of Banaras. When the city decides to observe *hartal* on the visit of the viceroy, the "reactionaries" stage a counter-satyagraha through a Brahmin priest who undertakes fast unto death if the city-dwellers carry out the satyagraha. The Brahmin is a glutton. He gorges enormous amount of food as a precaution against hunger. But the idea of sweets is tempting. He feels sorry for the self-inflicted fast and devises stratagems to waylay a sweetmeat-seller, and eats up his sweets. When the Congress secretary (who, incidentally, bribes the policeman posted by the district authorities) takes sweets which look and smell tempting, the Brahmin yields, and breaks his fast. "Why should I kill myself when others do not bother about me?"

The central character of this story, Motayram, whose prototype we first met in *Jalva-i-Isar* (1912), became the precursor of several caricatures later.

*Mandir aur Masjid* is woven round the characters of a Muslim zamindar, Choudhury Itarat Ali, and his extremely loyal Rajput *chaprasi*, Bhajan Singh. Itarat Ali hold in equal respect both Hinduism and its temples and Islam and its mosques. Itarat Ali is what a good Hindu or a good Muslim ought to be. Because of his liberality towards his Hindu subjects, the fanatical Muslims dislike him. They plan to stage a showdown. Janmash-tami day is seized of by them to attack a Hindu temple. Bhajan Singh who is deputed by Itarat Ali to go to the scene of the incident is furious at what he sees and, strong as he is, he beats up many of the Muslims who had entered the temple. Among those killed is the son-in-law and heir-apparent of Itarat Ali. Bhajan Singh is remorseful and wishes to kill himself. But Itarat Ali is a man of strong character; he saves him and is not sorry that his son-in-law who had defiled the Hindu abode of God, has been rightly punished. He goes out of his way to hide Bhajan Singh from the arm of law, and, when the latter surrenders himself for the sake of safety of Itarat Ali, he defends Bhajan Singh much to the chagrin of the Muslim fanatics.

When acquitted, Bhajan Singh is made a hero by the Hindu fanatics who have been planning to take revenge for the earlier affront. On the following Janmashtami day, it is the turn of the Hindu fanatics, with Bhajan Singh at their head, to precipitate

trouble by singing in front of the mosque and then entering the mosque and beating up the Muslims. Itarat Ali, who had done all to save Bhajan Singh and had pardoned his crime of murdering his son-in-law who had defiled the temple, is deeply pained at the defiling of the mosque. He questions the propriety of this act and wishes to kill Bhajan Singh who sees his own mistake. Bhajan Singh is ready and willing to be sacrificed. "You saved my head, master, it belongs to you; I am merely its custodian. You are merciful and cannot behead me. And if you do so here, there would be a furore. Send someone tomorrow morning to my house to take it. Who can guess as to who killed me at my own house? Pardon my failings."

KAYAKALPA, IN PART, echoes the Hindu-Muslim riots in some parts of Northern India and the issues involved therein. It was started on April 10, 1924, i.e. only ten days after Premchand had completed the Urdu version of *Rangabhoomi*.

The novel's hero, Chakradhar, is the son of Munshi Vajradhar who is self-made and has risen to the position of an officiating *tehsildar*. Chakradhar also is self-made. He has taken an M.A. degree through his own efforts. The father wants Chakradhar to secure a government job but the son decides to serve public good. After a good deal of persuasion he agrees to become a tutor to Manorama, daughter of the dewan of Jagdishpur. The pupil is attracted towards the teacher because of the latter's high character and ideals. Chakradhar's father, worldly-wise, uses his son's position as tutor to the dewan's daughter to worm his way into the confidence of the *taluqdar* Raja.

Chakradhar's father wants the son to get married. But Chakradhar is unwilling. He is, however, persuaded to go to Agra to see Ahalya who, as a child, was rescued in a fair and brought up by Yashodanand. In Agra, Chakradhar witnesses Hindu-Muslim riots over the sacrifice of a cow at a place where it had never been done before. The Hindu-Muslim tension has been created by the vested interests; the atmosphere has been so vitiated that the leaders of the two groups merely want an excuse to precipitate a violent situation. Yashodanand and Khwaja Mahmood have been friends and classmates. They have been members of Seva Samiti which was set up to counter communal propaganda and work for social welfare. On the Hindu-Muslim issues, the two are now pitted against each other. Insistence on rights leads to tension.

"The gods of the two, who had been sleeping all the while, now take on a new shape. Devotion of the devotees also takes new form. While the mullahs run down the Hindu gods, the

Brahmins decry the Prophet." Says Khwaja Saheb: "Any Muslim who abducts a Hindu girl would earn *sawab* equal to a thousand *Haj* pilgrimages." Says his friend Yashodanand: "The murder of one Muslim is equal to, even better than, one hundred thousand *godans*."

Chakradhar, an idealist, is unmoved by the arguments of the two groups. He tells the Muslims that they must kill him before they kill a cow; he tells the Hindus that, to save the cow, they must not kill their brothers and that they must go back to their homes. The riot is prevented. And it is the "victor" Chakradhar who is presented to Ahalya. He gives his consent to marry her, but his father is opposed because the girl's parentage is not known.

The widowed Rani Devipriya of Jagdishpur is a nymphomaniac, ever in search of new favourites. She does everything possible to look young. Rajkumar Mahendra Vikram Singh, who comes to her, recognises her as his wife in a previous birth. He tells her how he was born again after his last death, how and where he was educated at his home and in Berlin, how he met a Buddhist *Bhikshu* from Tibet and how he went to Tibet and met a *mahatma* through whose association he came to know the mysteries of death and rebirth, and got certain unusual powers. "What we call death and of which the world is afraid," he tells her, "is only a pilgrimage." His words impress Rani Devipriya so much that she leaves her estate to Vishal Singh, the brother of her husband and the husband of her sister, and goes away with Rajkumar Mahendra.

The Rajkumar's unusual powers bring back to Devipriya her youth. In this process of rejuvenation, she remembers vividly everything of her previous life of unfulfilled desires. In what is tantamount to space flight, Mahendra is killed and she goes to his estate at Harshpur.

Thakur Vishal Singh, as an heir apparent, had been an idealist and an opponent of repression by the police or exploitation by the moneylender. He wanted to change the face of the estate by establishing a sugar mill and building roads. "I wish to establish Ram Rajya; and when I do so, there would be tremendous prosperity in the estate." When he is yet to be installed, he declares that he is the sworn enemy of repression and that those who bring it about would come to grief.

For the installation of Vishal Singh, which is estimated to cost five lakh rupees, fresh taxes have to be levied because the treasury is empty. He does not wish to impose the customary tax for his installation, but Munshi Vajradhar, Chakradhar's father, tells him that his subjects are not as helpless as he thinks, and that they spend enormous amounts of money on social ceremonies, etc. The result is forcible exactions and repression. The Raja is now on one side, and on the other, is the Seva Samiti and his subjects.

Chakradhar, who was Vishal Singh's admirer, now says that the subjects who had high hopes from Vishal Singh have been disappointed, for he was behaving as did his predecessors. "Vishal Singh and other people lick the boots of those whom they should fight, and cut the throats of those whom they should embrace. . . and this repression is indeed committed by the educated class; education has made beasts of them." Says Manorama: "This is tantamount to kicking a fallen enemy; this is not governance of the subjects, but theft; this is like the vultures feeding on a dead carcass." Power and wealth bring about a complete transformation in Vishal Singh and, when Chakradhar espouses the cause of the common people, the Raja tells him that it is all due to his--and Samiti's--incitement to rebellion.

Vishal Singh asserts his rights and says that his subjects are like dust under his feet and that he can do anything he desires, that none has a right to come in between him and his subjects. "You protect their soul, and we their life." Chakradhar admits having enlightened the people about their rights, but insists that he never told them that the Raja had no right to co-exist. "I know that the day the rajas are not needed, they would disappear from the world."

Tension mounts in Jagdishpur, and unable to bear the oppression, the subjects "revolt." The *chamars* refuse to work on empty stomach and are ready to leave the estate to escape from forced labour without even food. There is a firing. Chakradhar, who is leading them, is injured. The mob is excited and wishes to kill the Raja and the British magistrate. Chakradhar, however, warns the mob that they can harm the adversary only at the cost of his life. The same British magistrate gets Chakradhar arrested and tried. He gets two years' imprisonment. The Raja wants Chakradhar to give an undertaking that he would quit the estate for good before he can be released. But Chakradhar

is no coward; he believes in *ahimsa* and love. Within the jail walls there is a fracas between the police and the convicts. Chakradhar tries to save the police chief but is tried for inciting the convicts! In the scuffle, anyway, he is injured.

Manorama wields influence over Vishal Singh who woos her, and persuades him to ask the British Collector, Jim, to release Chakradhar, so as to arrange for his treatment outside the jail hospital. The Collector is drunk and calls names to the Raja. This leads to a scuffle wherein the Raja overpowers Jim. Chakradhar, Jim agrees, is to be sent to a hospital outside the jail. But Chakradhar refuses to move until the others injured in the fracas are also transferred along with him for treatment outside. Chakradhar is tried, and Manorama secures his release by asking the trying magistrate who happens to be her brother.

Meanwhile, Manorama has been persuaded to become the fourth wife of Vishal Singh who did not have any child from the first three. Chakradhar's father negotiates the marriage.

Chakradhar is acquitted, and is honoured publicly, Manorama playing a notable role. He is convinced that the greatest defect in our national leaders is that they do not go to the villages to acquaint themselves with the conditions there; they stay in the cities instead. Until they go to the villages, he says, they can never have that power at their back, nor can they influence the masses. And without popular support or power the national leaders cannot be successful in their attempt at liberation.

Manorama also wishes to accompany him to the villages, but he dissuades her. She, however, helps him financially. She still adores him and tells him that she married Vishal Singh only because it fitted into his scheme of things.

To get away from Manorama, Chakradhar goes to Agra which is again torn asunder by communal riots. Yashodanand has been murdered. Khwaja Saheb feels pained to see his friend murdered and to see Ahalya abducted. There is a search for Ahalya by Khwaja Saheb. She is found in the house of the Khwaja's son. His son, the abductor, who tries to rape her, has been killed by Ahalya. The Khwaja does not weep at the murder of his son, killed in the attempt to rape Ahalya; "he did something horrible, something which is inhuman."

The excuses to precipitate communal riots at times, he says, are so trivial and frivolous as to arouse contempt. While the leader

of one group goes to the house of the Collector in the morning to *salaam* him, the leader of the other goes there in the evening. Both swear by their loyalty to him.

Khwaja Saheb is converted. "It is only through unity that this nation will achieve its liberation. Yashodanand was as much a supporter of unity as myself, but God alone knows what power came into the picture to influence the minds of both of us. We wanted to be friends, but something beyond us pitted us against each other."

And again: "There are some people in both the communities whose prestige and prosperity is dependent on the continuance of tension between the two communities. I sincerely believe that whether you be a Hindu or a Muslim, you should be a truthful and a good man. No one community can have the monopoly of all the good qualities. Not all the Muslims are gods, nor all the Hindus *kafirs*. Anyone who hates the members of the other community is as far removed from God as possible."

Says Yashodanand's wife: "I used to tell him not to get involved in these Hindu-Muslim tussles. There is no way out either for the Hindus or the Muslims; the two have to live in this country and to die in this country. Neither can swallow the other. The two should live in unity and peace."

Chakradhar, who has reached Agra, marries Ahalya (on the third day after the last rites of Yashodanand had been performed) and returns to Jagdishpur. But he is unwelcome in his father's house where Ahalya, who had been abducted by Muslims, is considered an untouchable. Husband and wife, therefore, go to Allahabad to live there. In due course, Chakradhar gets a son who is named Shankhadhar.

After some time, Chakradhar receives a telegram from Vishal Singh that Manorama is on the sick bed. The entire family goes to see her and stays as the Raja's guest. Ahalya and Manorama get on well. Shankhadhar is more fond of Manorama than of his own mother. Chakradhar and Manorama introduce new reforms in the estate.

Chakradhar is involved in an accident and when a villager refuses to help him, Chakradhar is furious. He hits him. The victim's brother, who had been an inmate of jail with Chakradhar, is surprised. "You have changed so much. You have become so hard-hearted. Inside the jail you were the very picture

of kindness and love. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I would not have believed it. I am sure you must have got a job or an estate." Chakradhar is remorseful. He apologises. "Power has corrupted me. I have now experienced that in this atmosphere it is impossible for me to keep my values intact." Manorama searches for Chakradhar and takes him back.

In the meantime, it is discovered that Ahalya is none other than the lost child of Vishal Singh, lost in a fair twenty years earlier. Ahalya's son Shankhadhar becomes the heir apparent to issueless Vishal Singh. Ahalya becomes indifferent to Chakradhar. While she is lost in the comforts of life, Chakradhar wants her to go with him. She expresses hesitation.

Afew days later, Chakradhar, who feels lost, leaves the home one night.

Subsequently, Shankhadhar goes in search of his father and traces him, but he does not disclose his full identity and writes to his mother. While he is still there, he gets a letter from his mother that she is seriously ill. He leaves to see his mother who, having got fed up with her life of luxury, is now living in Yashodanand's poor dwelling. On the way, Shankhadhar, against his wishes, gets down at Harshpur. He seems to recognise the place, and makes for the palace where he meets Rani Kamala who is none other than Devipriya. The two realise that they had been husband and wife in the previous life. They go over in their minds through what they have lived in the past.

Raja Vishal Singh is wanting another marriage. The marriage party is about to leave when Ahalya and Shankhadhar, as also Kamala, reach there. Vishal Singh recognises Shankhadhar, his grandson, to be the exact copy of his elder brother, Devipriya's husband. ("He is just like his twin brother; had there been an old servant he would have verified.") Vishal Singh's wife also sees Kamala to be identical to her sister, Devipriya. All this seems to be baffling!

Shankhadhar and Kamala are getting on towards consummation, when Shankhadhar, struck by some unseen power, faints and tells Kamala: "We shall meet again. This drama will be over the day love is freed of sexual desires."

Raja Vishal Singh also arrives. He finds Shankhadhar dead and himself dies of shock. Comes Chakradhar. He is told everything, but does not weep. Ahalya also dies. Chakradhar's parents are



also dead now. Kamala, who was Devipriya, now reigns as "*tapasswini* Devipriya."

Such then is the story of *Kayakalpa*.

Premchand's handling of the theme of birth and death makes this novel incomprehensible in parts.

The original draft of *Kayakalpa*, significantly, mentions three alternative names for the novel, *Asadhiya Sadhana*, *Maya Swapna* and *Artanaad*. Part II of the manuscript, however, mentions only one name, *Artanaad*, as against *Kayakalpa* given to the published version. Corrections and copious changes have been made in the draft which differs substantially from the published version. These changes relate not only to the chiselling of the language but also to the reweaving of plots and to connecting the different themes of the novel.

How worried Premchand was about finances at this time is indicated by the calculations of various types in the pages of *Kayakalpa's* manuscript. Some of these are quite elementary and could have been done orally. There is also a mention of the fact that the house rent has to be paid immediately!

Within the pages of the manuscript of *Kayakalpa* are also found suggestive details of the principal characters of the novel. These details, it is interesting to note, are in English! We quote from the manuscript.

"IDEAS: Trials and troubles mould the human character; they make heroes of men; power and authority is the curse of humanity; even the highest fall a victim to power and lose their character. Chakradhar rose morally while struggling for existence; his fall began when he came to power."

On another page are some interesting suggestions indicating that he used to draw his characters from actual life. Along with the imaginary names of the principal characters, he would also mention real names as *aide memoirs*. The following sentences (in English) are significant: "Vibudha is Yash Narain Upadhyaya—crafty, parsimonious, selfish, but serviceful, tactful; Vishal Singh is Bechanlal—simple, honest; Kalyan Singh is Chandrika.... Chakradhar is J. Prasad—very shy." Here are some more suggestive traits (in English) of the characters of *Kayakalpa*.

"The new Rani's father is Nana—perfectly selfish, dishonest, unscrupulous, drunkard, hopes to build his fortune with his daughter."

“Chakradhar’s father—flatterer, kind, generous, mild, simple-hearted.”

“The Pandit (Vibudha Prasad) and his wife both turn Hindu *sangathankars*.”

“Vibudha is a Persian-read man. Knows very little Sanskrit. His dialogue must be of an educated Mussalman.”

“Chakradhar always seeks God in man.”

“Rani is rejuvenated. She forgets her previous birth, who she was, how she got rejuvenation. Rajkumar begins to decline from the same day. Rani afraid to approach him. Struggle. In the end Rani loses her balance. Passion overcomes her. She approaches Rajkumar. A love scene. The next day Rajkumar, seized by a fatal sickness, dies. Rani again sinks into self-gratification. She builds her Rangashala. She again leads a life of flippancy.”

“Rajkumar takes his birth in Kunwar Vishal Singh’s house from Ahalya. When the boy grows into a lad, he starts a tour throughout India. He reaches Telari, sees the Rani, memories begin to revive. Rani making approaches.”

## Disappointment from Urdu

IT WAS ABOUT this time that the identity of the person writing under the name of "Premchand" was revealed to the readers of Urdu journal *Zamana*. "Are the readers of *Zamana* aware of the fact that 'Premchand' is only a pen-name, adopted by our old and esteemed friend Dhanpatrai, B.A., because of certain special reasons? Old readers of the journal would perhaps remember that its earliest issues carried interesting and absorbing literary pieces by him. We have no hesitation in revealing now that 'Navabrai' and 'Premchand' are the two names of one and the same person- Dhanpatrai. The only difference is that while 'Navabrai' had not graduated, 'Premchand' has taken his B.A. degree from the Allahabad University. 'Navabrai' was a school teacher, but 'Premchand' kicked that job during the non-cooperation movement and, after serving several national institutions, is now engaged in serving national literature as his whole-time occupation."

Premchand was very busy writing in Hindi, added *Zamana*, but "whenever he has leisure he writes for his old friend." The journal proposed to serialise an "interesting" drama woven round the tragedy of Karbala, and also referred to the rapid strides being made by Hindi which had drawn a great writer like Premchand towards it and had freed him from the worries of a livelihood. Encouragement to writers of Urdu, the journal lamented, was absent and "without such encouragement no language can really make headway."

*Zamana's* lament was justified. For, while Premchand's Hindi books\* sold well, he found it difficult even to find publishers for his Urdu books. As we have seen above, *Baazaar-i-Husn*, written originally in Urdu, was first published in Hindi as *Sevasadan*, and only subsequently in Urdu. The same is true of *Prem-*

\*Premchand's works were now being freely translated into most Indian languages other than Urdu.

*ashram*, the first edition of which was sold out within a few months. No publisher was, however, ready to undertake the publication of its Urdu version, namely, *Gosha-i-Afiat* which, like *Baazaar-i-Husn*, had been written originally in Urdu. This situation persisted for quite some time.

In fact, one of the considerations in starting a press, it appears, was the difficulty which Premchand experienced in getting his Urdu books published. "I propose setting up a litho press," he had told Nigam in 1923. "People say that a litho press in Banaras cannot be a success, but I wish to give it a trial. Several of my books, as you know, are ready for publication. *Prem Pachisi* is sold out (and a new edition is called for); *Gosha-i-Afiat* is incomplete only because there is no publisher ready to undertake its publication. I also wish to publish my latest drama *Sangram* in Urdu as well. By the time all these are published, my new novel would also be ready."

Five months later he was still at the idea. "I have decided to publish my Urdu books and propose to set up a small litho press of my own. Once you had mentioned about the sale of your press. What sort of a press is it? What is its size? Is it in a working condition? Is the machinery all right? . . . Does it print four pages of *Zamana's* size at a time or eight? Please let me have the necessary information on all these points as early as possible. Delay would mean loss."

The first edition of 5,000 copies of *Rangabhoomi* was nearly sold out by 1926. The Marathi edition, *Jagacha Bazar*, had also been published. But not yet the edition in Urdu in which language it was first written. In the Preface to the first edition of Volume II of *Chaugan-i-Hasti*, published by Darul Ashayat of Lahore in 1927, Premchand said: "*Rangabhoomi's* first edition in Urdu is being published some three years after the Hindi edition. While preparing the manuscript of the Hindi edition, so many changes were made in the original Urdu manuscript that it was not fit to be sent to the press. There were also several chapters that were added to the Hindi edition. These had to be incorporated into the manuscript for the Urdu edition. Consequently, the entire manuscript in Urdu had to be brought into line with the Hindi edition. I am extremely grateful to my esteemed friend Munshi Iqbal Verma Sahr Hitgami who undertook this onerous task upon himself. . . ."

Sahr, incidentally, wanted payment at eight annas per Hindi page, or Rs. 465. "If I get Rs. 600 for the book," wrote Premchand, "I'd think I would have achieved a miracle. To ask for Rs. 465 is fantastic. I have told him to get it published from any publisher he can and get me Rs. 300 and keep the balance for himself. Alternately, I have indicated, he should accept four annas per page. Yet another course open to him is to share with me whatever the publisher gives, in the ratio of 2:3. Am I unfair? If you think I am, please tell me. Keeping in view the conditions in the field of Urdu, Rs. 150 is not a bad payment. He would have spent on this work at the most three months, and, if he gets Rs. 150 for three to four hours' work a day, is it a bad proposition? I don't understand his line of thinking. If I pay him Rs. 465 I shall get nothing out of it. If he consults you, please put him wise." It was finally agreed on Rs. 200.

As no publisher was enthusiastic about undertaking the publication of *Gosha-i-Afiat* and *Chaugan-i-Hasti*, Premchand had to give the two Urdu versions to Darul Ashayat of Lahore for eight hundred rupees only (while *Premashram* alone had got him eighteen hundred rupees). His emphasis had obviously to shift to Hindi and, apart from starting his next novel, *Kayakalpa*, he also chalked out plans to republish his Urdu essays and biographical sketches, from *Zamana*, into Hindi. "Some twenty of them," he wrote to Nigam, "have been published in your journal. As I do not have a single file of *Zamana*, I ask you whether it would be possible for you to send me the files, one at a time, so that I can translate the sketches into Hindi and return the same to you. Alternatively, I will have to request Jag Mohan Dikshit to take the files from you to translate the biographical sketches and send them on to me. If, however, he does not agree, you will have to lend me the files."

*Karbala* too had sold in Hindi, but there was no publisher for the Urdu version even though some discriminating critics had praised it. He asked Nigam if he could serialise it. "I don't wish to rush through with the Urdu translation, and I am sending you only one scene. One or two more will be sent soon."

There was delay in publication in Urdu owing to the fact that there was prolonged consideration over the drama. "The drama had to be examined from all possible angles." Nigam has told us that "history books were referred to."

When Nigam wrote to Premchand that he should not write anything which would hurt the feelings of Shias, Premchand replied: "You can rest assured that I have been extremely careful to ensure that no disrespect of any sort is shown to them. Every single word has been weighed carefully, so that the religious susceptibilities of Muslims are not injured. The purpose of the drama is political—to cement the bonds of Hindu-Muslim unity."

While his Hindu friends, including Raghupati Sahai, who read it in Hindi, praised it, Syed Ahsan Sambhi, who was working as an assistant in *Zamana*, thought differently. His criticism and the summaries of other criticisms were sent to Premchand who wrote back: "It'd be better if you don't publish *Karbala*. There's nothing that I stand to lose, and I am not prepared to undergo these unnecessary pinpricks. I read the life of Hazrat Hussain. His zest for martyrdom moved me and I felt like paying a tribute. The result was this drama. If Muslims do not concede to Hindus even the right to pay tribute to Muslim caliphs and *imams*, I am not keen either. It is no use, therefore, to reply to the letters which have been advising you against publishing the drama.

"I do wish, however, to say a few things about Ahsan Sambhi's letter. He says that Shia Muslims would not like a drama being written about their religious leaders. If Shia Muslims avidly read or hear *Mathnavis*, stories and elegies on the life of their religious leaders, why should they have any objection to a drama being written on the subject? Or, is it because this one, *Karbala*, is written by a Hindu?

"History and historical drama, you would agree, are two different things. None can introduce changes in regard to the principal characters of a historical drama. In so far, however, as the secondary characters are concerned, one can change or modify them to the extent of freedom in regard to their conception. Asghar, according to some sources, was six months old. But in some legends, however, he was six years old. I have made use of the legend as it suited my purpose. Even if there were no such legends, it wouldn't make much of a difference; Asghar's, after all, is not an important character in the drama.

"Regarding Yezid, historians have painted him in much darker colours than I have. I couldn't help it. In fact, all that I have

mentioned was his drunkenness and his debauchery. He was certainly a drunkard; all the caliphs that followed the Eminent ones were drunkards—and they drank with abandon. This is what Syed Amir Ali has to say about Yezid: ‘He was both cruel and treacherous. His depraved nature knew no pity or justice. His pleasures were as degrading as his companions were low and vicious. He insulted the ministers of religion by dressing up a monkey as a learned divine and carrying the animal mounted on a beautifully caparisoned Syrian donkey. Drunken riotousness prevailed at court....’ I am sure, you’ll agree with me that Amir Ali is an authority on the subject. Have I painted Yezid in colours darker than these?...

“From the historical point of view you have objected to the traditional interpretation. I agree, there is no mention of this event in the old legends. There is, however, one version that I have taken from an article in *Aina* of Allahabad. But it is only a legend and may not be true. Even if you concede that it has been introduced to give a local colour, what of it? Drama is not history. It does not affect the principal historical characters. The aim of the drama, and of the principal character’s portrayal, is to make the Hindus pay a tribute to Hazrat Hussain. That’s why this drama which, apart from being religious, is political also.

“From the strictly literary standpoint, I concede the validity of your objections. I have never claimed to be a litterateur. Of their own accord, people call me ‘Insha Pardaz,’ ‘Sahar Nigar,’ this, that and the other. I only narrate simple things in a simple language and am unable to introduce literary flourishes and exaggerations. And when a drama has been written with the idea of being read by the common people, literary flourishes are out of place.

“Dramas are of two types, one for reading and the other for staging them. This drama was meant to be read and not for being staged. Anyhow, I am not keen on the publication of this drama. Let this debate, therefore, be postponed or taken to be concluded.

“Khwaja Hassan Nizami, incidentally, wrote a biography of Lord Krishna. Just because a Muslim divine had paid his tribute to Lord Krishna, Hindu critics lauded the attempt. My purpose was identical. If, however, Hassan Nizami can have

the freedom to pay his tribute to one of another religion but the same is denied to me, then all that I can say is that I am sorry. Kindly return the manuscript."

A re-examination of the points in the dispute proved that Premchand's contention was correct. The drama was accepted for publication. Writes Premchand: "So you have seen that what I had included was historically true. You kindly start serialising it. It is not necessary to introduce too many ghazals. I have not made Hazrat Hussain recite love songs. Songs, however, have been sung in the court of Yezid. And they are not out of place. If, however, the selection of ghazals is not appropriate, you can ask Hussain to select other poems and include them. . . .

"It is good if Mirza Zafar Ali Khan has carried out a few corrections or modifications. The fact is that I did not myself translate it from Hindi. Munshi Munir Haider Qureshi, a friend of mine from the Normal School, has done the translation. I shall translate the other parts of the drama myself and remove all the deficiencies of language so that, from the point of view of language, none will get a chance to pick holes."

In a note appended to the *Karbala*'s first instalment in *Zamana* (July 1926), "the Preacher of Love" laid emphasis on the fact that "communal tension does not reflect the natural state of a society. On the contrary, it is a social or political illness which is a temporary phenomenon in its life. Just as a human malady lasts for a few days or a few months, after which either a man is restored to good health or disappears from the worldly scene, there is always a limit to tensions or conflicts in a society. When you reach that limit, the people get fed up with daily bickerings and hate the tension. Or, there arise certain factors because of which the two hostile groups agree to resolve their conflicts diplomatically. At the present moment, clouds of communal conflict and tension hover in the skies of India. The Hindu-Muslim differences which are creating havoc in the country must have limits.

"In the history of the world, bigotry and conflicts between peoples and religions are nothing new. It is less than two hundred years ago that the Roman Catholics and Protestants were at each other's throats in France, the Netherlands and England. Only a few years ago, the trouble of Ulster and the Sin Fein



movement had assumed such proportions that the Hindu-Muslim differences would pale into insignificance. Today, the peoples of all these countries are passing their days in peace and contentment. India's destiny too will undergo a change one day. On the occasion of Deshbandhu C. R. Das's death anniversary, on July 11 last, Dr. Ansari announced that, following the example of the late Mr. Das, he would sever his connections with all communal organisations, e.g. the Muslim League and the Khilafat Committee. 'My religion,' he said, 'is swaraj.' And he appealed to the people that they should all get together for the liberation of India. If a dozen such active patriots from each province come forward to show, through words and deeds, that the key to the salvation of India lies only in mutual love and willingness to make sacrifices for the other, and to renounce, the atmosphere in the country would certainly change."

It, however, took two years before the drama could be completely serialised in *Zamana*, i.e. from July 1926. While the subsequent instalments appeared till April 1928, there was a controversy in some papers. Certain persons did raise objections. "As there were no points that had not been considered," says Nigam, "this sort of criticism attracted little attention." Notwithstanding Nigam's contention, a Muslim publisher of Lahore picked holes in the drama and expressed unwillingness to publish it in a book form in Urdu. Such being the state of Urdu publishing, there is little surprise that while *Chaugan-i-Hasti* appeared in 1927, *Gosha-i-Afiat* came out in 1928 and *Karbala* several years later.

## Short Stories of Mid-Twenties

AS IN HIS novels, so in his short stories of the period—collected in *Prem Pramod* published by Chand Press, in *Prem Dwadashi* edited by Dularelal Bhargava, and in *Prem Pratima* published by the Bhargava Book Depot of Banaras—Premchand was pre-occupied with themes relating to the non-cooperation movement; to the exposure of such evils as uneven marriages, dowry system and the social odium on those women who give birth to daughters; to the innate qualities of the poor peasantry and Harijans and to their exploitation by the moneylenders and the so-called *sadhus*; and to the depravity of the Brahmin priestly classes.

*Bhade ka Tattoo* is the story of two friends, of whom one, Yashwant, is idealistically inclined and critical of the mercenary attitude. He enters the civil service. The other, Ramesh, intelligent and realistic, enters the nationalist movement. Yashwant, on transfer to Agra, invites Ramesh to stay at his house overnight. That very night, however, there is a dacoity in the city. Ramesh, who is a marked man, is falsely implicated, arrested, tried and, under pressure, sentenced by Yashwant himself to seven years' imprisonment. While Yashwant, pricked by his conscience, resigns his job and becomes a practising lawyer, Ramesh, after his release, becomes a Robin Hood type of hero. He is caught and tried. Yashwant fights his case, not for the sake of his friendship or for his guilt in not protecting a friend who was at his place on the night of the happening, but for cash payment of two lakh rupees.

*Dhikkar* is the moving story of the only daughter of a widow. Within a year of her marriage, the husband and the mother-in-law of the daughter die. She takes refuge in the house of an uncle, where, despite her hard work, she is looked down upon with contempt. Once an affront on the occasion of her cousin's marriage so upsets her that she attempts to commit suicide and is saved by a friend of the cousin. The friend is so deeply moved

that he offers to marry her. Arrangements are made and the cousin takes her to the friend's house where the marriage takes place. The cousin is persuaded to leave the house, and goes to Bombay where his friend stays. The friend is expecting his mother and wife. When, however, the girl and her mother-in-law are about to board the train there comes the girl's uncle who uses extremely abusive language, calling her a curse on the earth. She is crestfallen and, after the train steams off, she jumps out of it and puts an end to her life, lest she should bring bad luck to the husband who had been so generous to marry her.

*Decree ke Rupaye* is woven round the life of Kailash, an editor, who considers himself to be the servant of the people and does not spare even his class-fellow and closest friend, Naim, a highly-placed government official, who has accepted a bribe of twenty thousand rupees in a murder case and has admitted it to the editor friend. The editor is tried for defamation and sentenced to a fine of twenty thousand rupees. After the judgement, Naim goes to his friend's house, talks to him in terms of old friendship, and winds up the whole affair by his willingness to sign a receipt for twenty thousand rupees.

In *Mata ka Hridaya*, a widow's only son is implicated by the police in a terrorist conspiracy and sentenced to eight years' imprisonment. The mother is distressed. She plans to take revenge or to murder the police chief who has falsely implicated her son. With this object in view, she takes up employment in his house and brings up the police chief's only surviving child after the earlier four had died. In due course she gets attached to the child, and the child too cannot be without her. Once the child takes ill suddenly, and the woman who had taken up employment with the sole object of murdering the chief or his son, is more deeply distressed than the real mother of the child. "Mother's heart is the fountainhead of life."

*Shanti* is the moving story of a poor widow whose only issue, a daughter, is married with great difficulty. The husband, however, is irresponsible and a vagabond. Her life, therefore, is unhappy. Unable to adjust herself, the daughter commits suicide. The narrator, a friend of the family, finds it hard to convey the news of the suicide to the girl's mother, herself unhappy and lonely in life. But the mother has already been told about the sad news. She has now become resigned and contented because

she feels that it has been a good riddance for her daughter. She is at peace because she feels that her daughter who had given her life for protecting her self-respect was quite as brave as a brave son who dies the death of a martyr.

*Bhoot* is an eerie story in which a successful lawyer who loves his wife dearly yearns for a daughter. When, however, he does not get one, he, in effect, adopts his wife's stepsister as a daughter. While he is making arrangements for her marriage, his wife dies, after making him commit that he would see to it that the "daughter" is married with great pomp and show. He postpones the marriage and gives all the ornaments to the girl whom he had once fondled. When, however, she puts on the ornaments, he feels fascinated and so manages things that he himself marries her. When the two are together, the apparition of the lawyer's wife appears and haunts him.

*Grihadaha* is the story of the end of a family as the result of a second marriage. The stepmother that comes in the house is stern and cold towards the stepson, Satyaprakash. Discriminatory treatment is meted out to the stepson. She poisons the ears of her husband. Things come to such a pass that the stepson leaves the house and goes away to Calcutta to earn a living. He writes letters and fills in money orders outside a post-office. Because of his attachment to Gyanprakash, his stepbrother, he sends him presents and cash. The parents insist that Gyanprakash get married. But Gyanprakash is adamant that his brother, Satyaprakash, must marry first. The mother writes letters to the stepson accusing him of misleading her son. The father asks Satyaprakash to get married, but the latter sends all his savings as a present to the stepbrother's wife. The stepmother takes poison and dies. In her poisoned state, she bites the husband. The latter is on death-bed when Gyanprakash goes to Calcutta, searches out his brother and brings him to the home which has been ruined—"and should have been ruined long, long ago."

*Nairashya* portrays the sad plight of a woman who has given birth to three daughters. The husband and others in the family are sarcastic and humiliate her. Her sister-in-law holds out false hopes, so that she is not humiliated. She gets her medicines from a *sadhu*. Despite prayers, etc. she gets another daughter. The husband threatens to leave the home. Yet another chance.

Again a girl. The husband is disgusted. But the wife dies after delivery.

*Ek Anch ki Kasar* exposes the fraud practised by some people who decry the system of dowry publicly and accept it secretly. One such hypocrite arranges the betrothal of his son and announces that the system of dowry must go. He writes out a speech specially for the occasion and gives it to his son to read it out. The son by mistake takes out the letter that his father has written demanding dowry and bargaining for it, and reads it. Therein is the exposure of the hypocrite, and his consequent annoyance and disgust.

*Uddhar* is a satire on Indian woman's sad plight. A girl's father persuades the father of a young man to agree to the marriage of his son who, however, refuses to enter into wedlock. The young man, who believes he has got tuberculosis and must not, therefore, marry, evades the question. When the father fixes up the marriage, the son is deeply pained at the prospect of leaving behind a young widow. In fact, he is so deeply distressed that he disappears. The find of a skeleton along the railway track after some time leads to the suspicion that it was his. In the meantime, his widow worships his memory and when, on a day of festivities, she is told of a present from her father-in-law's, she is moved by the thought of one who laid down his life so that she may not suffer.

*Laanchhan* portrays to what limits doubts about the spouse's fidelity and immediate reactions thereto, can lead to—in this case seeking shelter by a true faithful Hindu woman in the house of a bad character. This comes about through the menial scavenger who misleads her. It is the last place that she should go to, but she is driven there against her wishes. The husband, on the other hand, seeing that his only child has been killed in an accident, and that he has driven his wife out, goes to the Ganges (with the intention of drowning himself).

*Nirvasan*, in the form of a dialogue, shows how a wife, who gets waylaid in a fair and returns home after a week or so, is turned out by the husband. The latter is callous to the hardships and the fight she had to put up to defend her honour, and does not agree to accept her back into the house. He, however, agrees to her seeing their son—but only "from a distance." She is so unhappy that she turns down even this offer and resigns herself to the

thought of having been a widow without any child.

*Narak ka Marg* is the diary of an unhappy woman married to a rich old man who entertains doubts about her fidelity. Denied true love, she gets so disgusted that she becomes callous towards him and, in fact, does not mourn his loss when he suddenly dies. She is envious of a friend whose husband is poor but adoring. A blind old woman promises her happiness and leads her astray. She is happier than before, but misses what true love is.

*Stri aur Purush* is an attempt to convey that what is most important to make a married life happy is not merely looks but the qualities of service and devotion. A handsome man, who hates the very sight of his ugly wife, gets an attack of paralysis which deforms his face and makes him very ugly indeed. He now adores his wife.

*Swarga ki Devi* portrays the character of a woman who, despite all the harassments from the mother-in-law, continues to be devoted to the husband and her two children. There is an epidemic and her father-in-law and mother-in-law die. The children secretly eat some exposed fruit. They too die of cholera. She is unhappy. The children's loss means much more to her than to the husband who is happier in the company of his friends. In fact, he is callous and indifferent and indulges in licentiousness. His wife, stunned to see him in the arms of a prostitute, does not take any drastic step. She only dresses herself well, makes up and wins over the husband's heart.

*Vishwas* is the story of the influence of a labour leader on a schoolmistress who is a social butterfly and who plays with the elite of the city of Bombay, including the governor. After a fiery speech in which the labour leader, Apte, makes allegations against the rich, including Miss Joshi, he is arrested. Miss Joshi wishes to try out her charms and gets him released. She calls on him and is deeply influenced by his faith, trust and honesty. She invites him to a party at her house and announces before everybody that she is his. The governor is disappointed. He gets Apte implicated in a conspiracy and woos Miss Joshi. She, however, threatens to shoot him, and the governor realises the force of true love and withdraws from the scene.

*Vidhwans* highlights what the curse of a poor old woman who earns her living by selling parched gram and barley, and is

exploited by the tyrannous zamindar, can lead to. Piles of work are imposed on her and the time limit set is short. The agents get annoyed and complain to the zamindar who orders that not only her hut be destroyed but also her pile of dried leaves used as fuel. The old woman refuses to vacate the village, jumps into the fire and immolates herself. The fire spreads and reduces to ashes not only the nearby huts but also the zamindar's mansion.

*Saubhagya ke Koday* is the story of an orphan living at the mercy of a Lucknow millionaire who has only one daughter. The orphan, Nathu, does menial jobs in the house and eats the leftovers. One day he is tempted to have the feel of the girl's soft bed, and lies on it. He is caught and thrashed with a whip for his indiscretion. Turned out of the house, he finds shelter in the house of a musician who trains him in music. Nathu develops into a virtuoso and is sent abroad for studies and returns with a great reputation as "N.R. Acharya." He is engaged by a theatrical company on Rs. 3,000 a month and is posted to the city of Lucknow and lodged in the house bought over by the company from the millionaire. The millionaire comes to see the house for sentimental reasons. His daughter, Ratna, is fond of music. The millionaire asks Acharya to marry his daughter. He agrees and marries her but feels guilty of not having revealed his identity. But Ratna knows the secret of his identity. She, however, tells him not to mention it to her father whose whipping, in fact, had been responsible for the meteoric rise of the young man.

*Tentar*\* is built round the usual belief that the child born after three brothers or sisters brings bad luck in the shape of death of either the father or the mother. When a girl is born after three sons, the grandmother (paternal) is very sad and does not only not wish her son to celebrate the occasion, but wishes him to see that she dies of starvation. There is so much talk of the bad luck supposed to have been brought by the young girl that the mother actually starves her if for no other reason than to please the mother-in-law. And when the grandmother is unable to convince her son of the prospects of bad luck, she feigns sickness and puts up appearances as if all this sickness is due to the new

\*Premchand himself was a "tentar."

arrival in the house. After the show of this farce, she sees that the gods were propitiated. (For, otherwise, the young one would have been the harbinger of death in the family.)

For some reason, which only a psychologist would know, Premchand about this time wrote several stories relating to his childhood days. We have already referred to *Qazaki*, where he delineated the character of a postal runner, Qazaki by name, who narrated interesting tales to children, and *Chori* depicting the life in a village school, the way the children behaved, the way the teacher acquitted himself, and the sorrows and joys and the antics of the young ones.

In *Ramleela* he described children's amusement at the ludicrous masks, human and animal, put on by the characters in Ramleela and also the hypocrisy of the rich who would cheat the poor artistes who played the leading roles, and would allow themselves to be blackmailed by prostitutes who danced to help raise money for the Ramleela.

*Deeksha* is the story of a young man's vow of temperance while still at school. When, however, he graduates and becomes a lawyer, he is tempted and takes alcohol with his friends. In due course, he becomes an addict and cannot resist the temptation. Once, when he goes to argue a case and stays at the rest house, in the other wing of which stays a British civilian, he feels like having a drink and negotiates with the *khansama*. The dishonesty is detected by the British civilian who beats up the khansama and humiliates the lawyer whose face he blackens. It is a lesson to the lawyer.

*Adhar* portrays village life in which the strongest man in the village dies after chasing a hefty bull which has been damaging crops. His widow's future is uncertain. Her parents make arrangements for her remarriage, but her mother-in-law persuades her to get married to the younger brother of her husband, a mere child of five. She brings him up like her own child, the work giving her life a purpose. After thirteen years, when she is to be betrothed to the young man, she refuses and tells everybody that her youth has been devoted to the bringing up of the brother-in-law, and that she could not bring herself round to agreeing to become his wife! She insists that he should marry someone else, and says that she would still look after his children as she had looked after him.



*Mukti Marg* is woven round a casual enmity between a farmer and a haughty and prosperous shepherd. The former is sore at the latter's sheep trespassing the fields. The shepherd is offended and at a convenient opportunity sets the farmer's standing crop to fire. The farmer is ruined and becomes a labourer. He knows who has done it but dares not mention the name. He now so conspires with the village butcher that his own calf, left in the custody of the shepherd, is poisoned. The responsibility is naturally that of the shepherd's and he is asked by the village community to atone for it. In the process he too is ruined. The shepherd also becomes a labourer. The two now confess their own guilt to each other.

*Sabhyata ka Rahasya*, like *Samasya* (or *Muamma*), poses the same question as to which way is better—the way of the magistrate who accepts bribes to release a culprit on bail but sentences his own poor mali, who is caught redhanded stealing fodder for his starving bullocks at the dead of night, to a hard sentence. The magistrate does this because he is keen to create an impression that he is honest and impartial!

*Sava Ser Gehoon* is the stark portrayal of the exploitation by a Brahmin turned moneylender of a poor peasant who goes out of his way to feed the sadhus. Once the peasant borrows a seer and a quarter of wheat from the Brahmin and returns it along with the annual gift of five seers without, of course, specifically mentioning it. Seven years later, the Brahmin tells the peasant that the loan of wheat on compound interest totals five and a half maunds. He forces the peasant to overwork himself to pay it in cash, some sixty rupees in the shape of interest, the principal standing against his account. The peasant is now forced to work on the Brahmin's farm on half a seer of barley a day. After servitude of twenty years the peasant dies, and the Brahmin takes his son on to work on the farm. "This is no imaginary story; it is a true one."

*Muktidhan* is the touching story of a Muslim peasant, Rahman, who is out to sell his beautiful cow. He is deeply attached to the cow and does not agree to sell it to the butcher who offers him forty rupees, and he gives it instead to the moneylender Daudayal for thirty-five rupees. The latter is touched by Rahman's attachment to the cow. So, when Rahman goes to him to borrow two hundred rupees for his mother's *haj*, Daudayal

lends it willingly. Before, however, he can pay back the principal and one hundred rupees as interest, Rahman's mother too dies, and he has again to go to the moneylender for another two hundred rupees for her last rites and funeral feast. He hopes to pay off the principal and interest out of his excellent sugarcane crop. But then it catches fire. Rahman is ruined. He does not know what to do. Comes Daudayal's agent. Rahman goes with an appeal to postpone the realisation till the harvesting of the next crop. The moneylender tells him: "For my religion (protection of a cow) you sacrificed five rupees. For your religion (i.e. your mother's haj and the religious ceremonies connected with her death) I have paid you according to my status. We are quits."

*Shudra* is the touching story of a poor and hard working woman of low caste, who gets married with some difficulty, and is left by her husband who does not return. An unknown person plays a ruse and takes her to Calcutta, whence he puts her on a ship for indentured labour on plantations abroad. By a coincidence she finds that the inspector in charge is none other than her husband. He too does not believe his eyes. The British manager of the plantation asks that she, or a companion whom she has befriended on the ship in her difficulty, be sent to his bungalow. He resists and is beaten up. His wife hears the wails and goes to the saheb and saves the husband. She, however, influences him in an emotional way and he takes the husband to the hospital. The husband does not trust her fidelity. And she goes to put an end to her life by drowning in the river. Her husband realises his mistake, runs after her and himself jumps into the river. The two unite in death.

There is also a continuation of the caricatures of the sadhus and priestly classes who fatten on the credulity of the ordinary people.

*Babaji ka Bhog* highlights the faith of an ordinary peasant to whom sadhus are synonymous with religion. Half of his year's produce has been taken away by the moneylender and the other half by the agent of the zamindar. The one maund of wheat bought with the money procured by selling fodder has also been eaten up. Comes a sadhu to the doorstep. He cannot be sent away. So the peasant arranges for the sadhu's food from out of the foodgrains kept for the gods and by taking recourse to credit. Thus, while the hard-working peasant and his wife feed

the sadhu almost to gluttony, they themselves go to sleep on empty stomach!

*Dand* shows the chain reaction of corruption in official circles. A magistrate accepts bribes from both parties to a case and favours the one who has given him a bigger one. When the Brahmin defendant, who loses the case, undertakes to stage a fast unto death outside the magistrate's house, the latter is unnerved, especially because his wife is perturbed. The magistrate is prepared to pay back the hundred and fifty rupees that he had accepted. But the Brahmin wants to blackmail him into paying five thousand rupees. Ultimately, the magistrate secretly pays the huge amount at the dead of night. The Brahmin, however, dies out of sheer joy. The magistrate takes the money from the pockets of the Brahmin. The news of the Brahmin's death spreads in the town. The magistrate is socially ostracised. His servants leave him. Nobody talks with him. Nobody agrees to accept the hand of the magistrate's daughter. Obsessed with the idea of the Brahmin's death, his wife dies. This then is the punishment.

*Hinsa Paramo Dharma* portrays Jamid, a character like Baudam's. A rustic Muslim, he is attracted by the look of the platform of a temple and cleans it voluntarily. The devotees wish to convert him to Hinduism. When, however, he stops a priest from manhandling an old man who is not at fault, the entire crowd turns against him. He is beaten up. The Muslims now boost him and he is made a hero. When, however, he sees a *maulvi* about to assault a Hindu woman who has been waylaid, his blood boils and he rescues her to the annoyance of the Muslims. He thus sees the hypocrisy of the life in towns and the corruption and degradation that is hidden behind the facade of the so-called men of religion. His conscience revolts and he returns to the village "where religion means sympathy, love and camaraderie."

*Mantra* is built round the life of one of the preachers who go out to "save" the people, particularly the Harijans, from embracing Islam. The leader of the Hindu preachers is jeered at by the Harijans who find his arguments hollow and divorced from realities. When, however, the Muslim proselytizers assault the leader and leave him for "dead," it is the same Harijans who attend on him and bring him back to life. There is subsequently a plague in the village and most of the inhabitants leave. The

preacher who is obliged to the Harijans, stays on and gets the Harijans and some others medicine, etc. and saves them. Instead of preaching to them, he finds that he has learnt a lesson.

We also come again to caricatures of Motayram who figured in *Satyagraha*.

*Guru Mantra* is the caricature of the hypocritical Chintaman who is Motayram's "Jeeves." He takes on the holy saffron robes because invitations to feasts have become too few. Chintaman is in search of a good catchy slogan. The one that he thinks of arouses sarcasm and laughter. There are consultations between the two friends. The story is thus woven round the slogans which are tried out before other sadhus.

*Shuddhi* attempts to explain the real meaning of conversion. The hero of the story, a rich man, gets into bad company, leaves his wife and mother and embraces Islam. He runs through all his savings and falls on evil days. Informed of his straits, his wife comes to "reclaim" him. It is necessary to reconvert him to Hinduism. He has his own views on the matter, but agrees.

*Kamana Taru* portrays the life of a prince in hiding, who falls in love with the daughter of one of his loyal subjects. The two together water a plant which is the remembrance of his coming. Just on the eve of marriage, he is arrested by his adversaries, in opposing whom the loyalist is killed. The prince is imprisoned for an indefinite period. It is after twenty years' imprisonment that he is able to escape from the fort to find his way to the place of his romance. The house is desolate. The tree which he and his beloved had nurtured, now has the nest of a lonely she-sparrow whose chirping is very moving. He dreams that the sparrow is in effect his beloved. When this is confirmed by the cultivator of a neighbouring field, the prince calls the sparrow and it comes to him. That night the prince's soul is also gone. The two are a couple of sparrows now.

*Bahishkar* is built round the theme of a blot on the family's name leading to ostracisation by the village community. Som Dutt, a rich man in the village, turns out his wife, Kalindi. Another one, poor Gyanchandra, and his wife, Gobindi, give her shelter. The rich one marries again and finds out something about the past of Gobindi's parents. This leads to Gyanchandra's ostracisation, unemployment, and starvation. Gyanchandra's son dies; he drowns himself, and his wife dies of the shock.

*Jehad* narrates the story of a group of Hindu migrants from the north-western region of India—among them a pretty orphan girl, accompanied by her aunt, an ugly rich man, and a poor but handsome man. The group is surrounded by a posse of proselytizing Afridi tribesmen. The handsome young man allows himself to be bullied into embracing Islam. The rich but ugly one, who refuses, is murdered. The girl, who till now has been admiring the handsome man and hating the ugly one, now sits by the side of the dead, taking herself to be his widow. The Afridis are touched at this devotion. The handsome man goes from pillar to post, but the girl refuses to do anything for him or even to sympathise with him.

*Ansuon ki Holi* is a caricature of one who does not take part in the observance of Holi festivities. (Premchand himself played it with zest.)

*Khudi* is the delineation of a young orphan girl of unknown parentage, who grows in the village and obliges everyone by running on errands for them. She spurns all offers from the youth of the village, but falls for a traveller who lives with her for three days only and then disappears. He does not come back, but she hopes that one day he must. And she lives on this hope.

## Old Wine in New Bottle

WHILE PREMCHAND WAS engaged in writing his *Kayakalpa* and his collections of short stories were being published by his Saraswati Press and other publishers, he finalised a novelette, *Nirmala*, which was serialised in *Chand* of Allahabad from November 1925 onwards.

The social content of this novelette seems to suggest that it is the abridged version of some novel which Premchand had written in his early life when themes such as these had moved him. He himself wrote to a friend that the book wasn't a great work of literature or art. It only "exposed a social evil," namely, the evil consequences of an aged widower with several children, marrying a girl young enough to be his daughter.

The heroine of the novel—which has a unity of structure and plot unparalleled by any of his other novels—is fifteen-year-old Nirmala, the daughter of Babu Ude Dhan Singh, a well-to-do lawyer who is worried about the dowry he must give in his daughter's marriage. Mr. Sinha, father of the proposed bridegroom, has not explicitly demanded a specific sum as dowry but had, nevertheless, presumed that it would be worthy of his status.

Expenditure over the preliminaries alone exceeded five thousand rupees. Kalyani, wife of Babu Ude Dhan, impressed upon the husband the necessity of tightening the purse strings. Her well-intentioned advice led to a domestic altercation. While Babu Ude Dhan Singh was agitated, he went out for an evening stroll. A jail bird, who had old scores to settle with the pleader, murdered him. With the death of Babu Ude Dhan arose difficulties; Mr. Sinha broke off the engagement. And Nirmala had to be married at any cost.

Her mother, therefore, decided that she should be married at once to any one who would be willing to accept her hand, no matter what his age. Tota Ram, an aged pleader, on the wrong

side of forty—who had three sons, Mansa Ram, nearly as old as Nirmala, Jiya Ram and Siya Ram—was willing. He, however, was like a father to her in age, in constitution and in mental development. She could not reconcile herself to the position now thrust on her.

She sympathised with Tota Ram whom she pitied, and could dedicate her life to him. She could attend on him, worship him, respect him, but could not do the one thing he asked her to do—to love him.

Rukmani, Tota Ram's sister, felt jealous of Nirmala, because till the time Nirmala came into this house she herself had been the mistress of the household, a privilege which Tota Ram passed on to his young wife in order to make her happy.

Tota Ram, who knew that he was aged, used all the tricks aged men use to ensure the affection of a child-wife. He brought her presents and wealth; he spun yarns of his proclaimed bravery—yarns which none but the fool would believe. One day he told her that he had single-handedly overpowered three armed dacoits. When, however, a snake appeared in the house, he ran out to call for help and it was Mansa Ram, his eldest son, who in no time killed it with his hockey stick.

Mansa Ram was young, intelligent and good looking. Being of her age, Nirmala felt some intellectual affinity towards him. She liked him and felt happy when he sat by her side. She treated Mansa Ram as a good mother would. On learning, however, that Nirmala took lessons in English from Mansa Ram, Tota Ram packed him off to the school boarding house.

Nirmala's efforts to remove the misunderstanding served only to make it deeper. Once when Mansa Ram lay on deathbed, Nirmala, like a loving mother, went to the hospital. But the father would not bring his son home. Fortunately, before Mansa Ram closed his eyes, he fell on her feet, paid a warm tribute to her motherly love and, incidentally, clarified the position for Tota Ram who now felt ashamed of himself. But it was too late; his son had gone. And Nirmala soon gave birth to a daughter.

The shock of his son's death was too great for Tota Ram. His practice dwindled. His house was auctioned for paying off a debt. Jiya Ram stole Nirmala's ornaments and, ultimately, committed suicide. Nirmala would take care that every penny that was spent was put only to the right use.

Siya Ram, now Tota Ram's only living son, had to do all the shopping, and he was cross-examined about every pie which passed through his hands. Fed up with this life, he fled to Hardwar with a *sadhu*. Followed Tota Ram to bring him back and there lay Nirmala, grief-stricken, bedridden, uncared for and unattended to. She lay there on the bed for news from her husband, which did not come till her deliverance from her life of woes.

There was none in the house; the neighbours made ready to "give her a shoulder" to the cremation ground. But who would perform the last rites? Came a lone traveller, grief-stricken, exhausted, sunken, "the very picture of grief and ruination." It was Tota Ram!

Such then was the theme of the novelette which was subsequently published by the Chand Press of Allahabad as a book. The popularity of the novelette is indicated by the fact that its serialisation was followed by the publication, in the same journal, of a novel *Pratigya* from January 1927 onwards. This novelette drew heavily on *Prema* or *Hum Khurma-o-Hum Savab*. The novel, however, is a piece of fiction more competently handled. It differs from *Prema*, and begins with a scene inside the Arya Samaj Mandir where Amritrai, who is a widower (it wasn't so with the hero of *Prema*), has been deeply impressed with the lecture of Amar Nath (the new version of Dhanakdharilal which found a mention in *Kishna* and *Prema*). Amritrai takes a vow to marry none but a widow. Hence, his refusal to abide by his commitment to marry *Prema*, his sister-in-law, to whom he has been engaged for the previous three years, i.e. ever since the death of his wife. He persuades his closest friend, Professor Dan Nath, to marry her and himself pens the letter of acceptance which he forces Dan Nath to sign. *Prema* anyway is married to Dan Nath. She, however, still adores the good qualities of Amritrai. *Prema*'s friend, Purna, the wife of a poor Brahmin clerk, Basant Kumar, becomes a widow and *Prema*'s father, Badriprasad, who decides to give her shelter, tells his son Kamlaprasad to make the necessary arrangements. (In *Prema*, Badriprasad's family abhorred the very sight of Purna, and it was Amritrai who gave her material assistance.) Kamlaprasad, who is a debauch and who is unhappy with Sumitra, his domineering wife (in *Prema*, his wife was a sulking creature who felt jealous of *Prema*), tries to seduce her. Kamlaprasad is a sworn enemy



of Amritrai who is campaigning for a rescue home for widows. At one of the meetings called by Amritrai and his supporters, there is an apprehension of breach of peace in the city of Banaras. Prema, accompanied by her mother-in-law, goes to the place and, in the pandemonium, gets on to the platform and persuades even the goonda elements to contribute to the fund for the rescue home. Dan Nath is piqued and gets annoyed with Prema. In the meantime, Kamlaprasad's overtures to Purna perturb his wife who keeps a close watch on the goings on in the house. One day Kamlaprasad, on the pretext of chaperoning her to Prema's, takes Purna to a deserted garden-house and tries to force her to surrender to his desires. She hits him hard and runs out of the garden-house to be led by an old man to the rescue home built by Amritrai. Kamlaprasad becomes the butt of derision. So does his friend Dan Nath. And it is left to Amritrai to defend the honour of his friend Dan Nath. The two friends come closer to each other again and the wall of Dan Nath's suspicion over Prema's love toward Amritrai disappears. (This is different from Dan Nath's hatred towards Amritrai, leading in fact to the death of Purna and himself, and thus paving the ground for Amritrai's marriage to Prema.) Amritrai is now attached to the rescue home.

While *Nirmala* was published by the Chand Press of Allahabad, Premchand published *Pratigya* from his own Saraswati Press in Banaras. His next novel, as we shall see later, was *Ghaban* which he planned to start during the winter of 1926-27; the previous few months, specially the rainy weather, having been assigned to the translation in Urdu of a book on history. The work referred to in one of his letters was possibly the text of three lectures by Rai Bahadur Mahamahopadhyaya Gauri Shankar Hirachand Ojha on the "Indian Culture during the Middle Ages," published by the Hindustani Academy of Allahabad in 1931. An idea of the payment to Premchand can be had from his statement that "if a page of the manuscript is of the size of *Zamana*, two rupees a page should not be considered excessive."

In addition to the work of running the Saraswati Press, he continued writing short stories of which we have somewhat of a mixed fare.

*Sati*, for instance, is woven round a historical legend of the times of the Bundelas' tussle with the Marathas. Chintadevi,

the brave daughter of a Bundela chief, refuses to accept defeat on the battlefield—she had been trained as a warrior. One whom she accepts as her husband, for his bravery and devotion to duty, however, runs away from the battlefield while his army perishes. This is against the canons of the Bundela tradition. Chintadevi commits *sati*. While she is about to enter the flames, the husband returns and begs of her to desist from it. But Chintadevi refuses to recognise that the coward who had run away from the battlefield could be her husband. My husband is dead, she says, and immolates herself.

*Sujan Bhagat* is the story of a prosperous peasant who serves all those who come to his door. He is generous to all. While he gets the title of “Bhagat” and is pious and devout, his son and his wife think he is lazy. The authority of the head of the family goes from him to the younger ones. And he finds that if he gives anything to the beggars, his sons stop him from doing so. He feels humiliated and searches for a way out. He starts working very hard on the field. This restores his position in the family.

*Mange ki Ghadi* is the story of a low-paid clerk who does not fetch his wife because, he says, he cannot afford to maintain two souls on his meagre salary of thirty rupees. Nevertheless, he wishes to show off—certainly when he visits his in-laws. Once, for instance, he borrows, apart from other things, an expensive watch from a friend who wishes to do him a good turn. The watch is snatched away by his wife, and he cannot tell this to his friend who now insists that the clerk pay up the amount in monthly instalments of fifteen rupees. Later, the amount is returned to him by the friend through the clerk’s boss on the pretext of a promotion. All this is to show to the clerk that it is possible for him and his wife to live within the salary. The clerk fetches his wife and his friend makes a gift of the watch.

*Atmasangeet* is an atmosphere story where a princess is attracted by the sweet strains of music from across the river. She is obsessed with the desire to get to the source of the music and bargains with the boatman to ferry her across at the dead of night. She offers fantastic and unbelievable price. In the end, her obsession is so great that she identifies herself with the music and begins to dance, and in fact herself becomes the source of music.

In *Premsutra* the husband of a devoted wife and father of a daughter, falls for another woman and wishes to marry her. His

wife with their child leaves for her mother's house. The husband, however, fails to marry the woman of his choice, feels jilted and goes to Europe where, after some reassuring letters to his wife, he stops writing; he has married an English girl. The foreign wife discards the husband a few years later, and he returns home—a broken and lonely man. His daughter, in the meantime, has grown up and there are proposals for her marriage. The mother shirks, but ultimately accepts one, subject to approval by her father. The father meets the daughter, agrees and blesses her and begs of her successfully to bring about a reunion between the father and mother!

*Actress* shows the soft-heartedness of an actress who plays Shakuntala's part in a theatrical performance. She, who has played with the hearts of many a young man, is now being chased by one of the richest in the town. He is keen to marry her. His love is pure, and she feels that it would not be good of her to seduce a man who is so good and honest and who is taken in by her make-up. The night before the date scheduled for the marriage, she quietly leaves the town, goes across the river into "nowhere," leaving a note behind that the two could not be happy together, and that she would like him to get married to someone else and not search for her.

## Helping Writers of Tomorrow

PREMCHAND'S EMINENCE in the realm of Hindi letters—reflected in his being invited to literary gatherings, e.g. the Galpa Sammelan at Rae Bareilly, or to institutions such as the Gurukul Kangri—instead of going to his head, made him more humble, especially to those who had the interest of literature at heart. When young writers who had just started writing, came to him for guidance, he would leave his work to talk to them at length.

Mrs. Premchand has told us of her arguments with her husband to observe some discipline in regard to the time taken up by young writers who came to him without previous appointment and without consideration of the hour of the day, hampering his usual writing work. "They are like boats without oars," he told her, "and come to me for guidance and help. If I refuse, to whom else would they go? In a few years' time, these are the very people who would carry the burden of advancing Hindi literature. To show them the way is certainly the job of us, the elder writers. And if we don't, what right have we to find fault with their work? Also, if one has been blessed with some talent, it is one's duty to transmit it to others who would follow us."

Premchand considered it his primary duty to encourage young writers, and many of the writers who became famous since, have acknowledged a deep debt of gratitude to him. Prominent among them are the short story writer Sudarshan, poet Balakrishna Sharma "Naveen" who had been his colleague in the Marwari Vidyalaya at Kanpur, essayists like Ramvriksha Benipuri and Shivpujan Sahai, and Jainendra Kumar Jain.

Sudarshan's first meeting with Premchand in 1925 throws some light on the habits of Premchand. Sudarshan has said that when he called on Premchand's house, the latter had gone out. He, therefore, left a note giving his address. Next morning, Premchand sat outside Sudarshan's room in the hotel for two hours awaiting his return from a bath in the Ganges. Sudarshan

could hardly believe his eyes when he was told that the rustic-looking person facing him was none other than Premchand himself. It was characteristic of Premchand that within a few minutes the two talked to each other like age-old friends, Sudarshan fascinated by Premchand's guffaws of laughter.

"Why did you give up your old pen-name of 'Navabrai'?" asked Sudarshan.

"For a very good reason," said Premchand jocularly. "A *navab* must have a dominion to rule over. What have I?"

"But surely there are some without dominions too."

"That may be a good caption for a short story. But don't you think it would be vain of me to have a grandiose name to hide my poverty? I prefer the name which indicates love and contains within itself contentment." And having said this he laughed his full-throated laughter.

Two years later, Sudarshan wanted Premchand to write a foreword to his collection of short stories, *Baharistan*, and approached him fearing lest he should evade the request on one excuse or another. Premchand's reply was typical of his thinking. "I am a very independent type, and do not put up excuses or pretexts. Why should I? Why should I turn down your request for a foreword to your book? If we writers do not do this much for each other, who else would?"

Premchand's interest in Sudarshan, as in other writers, continued. Thus, when Sudarshan took up a job in Kanpur and ignored writing, Premchand went for him. And when Sudarshan asked if it was Premchand's wish that he should resign and devote all his time to writing, Premchand was candid enough. "Hindi publishers are not so well off as to enable the writers to live comfortably on their writings alone." It might be better for the latter, he said, if they could undertake the publication of books on cooperative basis. And he was prepared to do all that he could in that direction. This was because he sincerely believed that there could not be a healthy growth in the life of a nation until literature, social set-up and politics—all the three—moved in the right direction.

"When literature progresses, so does the social set-up. And when the social set-up improves, there is also an improvement in politics. Even though all the three move together, literature serves as the nucleus seed. It elevates our thoughts

and helps the development of the people. It also adds to our happiness. In fact, it is at the root of all the three."

He, therefore, thought that there should be an academy whose members could see in advance all the forthcoming books so that they could help and guide the younger generation by tendering expert advice. "The academy could also publish books on royalty basis, or as outright purchases. The ensuing relationship between the authors and the academy would certainly be better than the existing relationship between the authors and the publishers, where the publishers get away with the cream, resulting neither in the growth of healthy literature nor encouragement to the authors."

Along with Daya Narain Nigam and other friends, he worked steadily for the setting up of the Hindustani Academy. The scheme mooted by Y. N. Upadhyaya and Hafiz Hidayat Husain and supported by *Zamana* and others, was accepted by the then Governor of U.P., Sir William Marris, towards the middle of 1926, and announced in a government resolution published in the official Gazette dated January 22, 1927. The Academy which was inaugurated formally on March 29, 1927, at Lucknow, had a council consisting of Sir Tej Bahadur Sapru (President), the Minister for Education and the Director of Public Instruction of U.P., and the Vice-Chancellors of Allahabad, Lucknow, Aligarh and Banaras Universities, and thirty nominated members.

Premchand (whose name is mentioned as "Babu Dhanpatrai") was sixth in the list of those nominated. A group photograph of the Academy shows Premchand dressed in an *achkan* and a turban, standing in the second row. This membership was in a way a recognition by the State of his stature as a writer of Urdu and Hindi. Further recognition coming from the State was a feeler thrown to him in the shape of an offer for the award of the title of Rai Saheb. There was also an indication of recognition in "some other form."

Premchand's reaction to the offer was immediate: he spurned it. He, however, told the Indian friend who brought it, to convey his thanks to His Excellency the Governor and tell him that "I am an humble servant of the people and would gladly accept any title awarded by them, but not one bestowed on me by the government." By way of explanation, he told his wife: "Till now I have written for the masses of India. If I accept this

title, I would become a lackey of the British Government which would make me put across its viewpoint. I would no longer be a man of the masses."

What was true of the British rulers was true also of their props—the Indian princes. The Maharaja of Alwar sent an offer to appoint him his private secretary on four hundred rupees a month, in addition to the use of a free house and a free car. The offer was conveyed through half a dozen people specially sent by the Maharaja to Lucknow. Although financially he was not well-off, Premchand turned down the offer. "I am a rebel," he told them, "and that is the reason why I resigned my post in government service." They wanted him to write to the Maharaja. He wrote to the Maharaja a polite letter, telling him that he had devoted his life to literature and was grateful that the Maharaja read with interest whatever he wrote. "But I do not consider myself suitable for the post of private secretary which you have kindly offered to me. . . . If, however, it is possible for me, I'll certainly go there and see you."

Premchand later told his wife about the offer. Even though he had turned it down, he asked her of her views. His wife concurred with his views. "Only those who are given to flattery and sycophancy can serve the rajas and maharajas. None who cares for self-respect can." The writer and his wife recollected his earlier encounters with authority, the treatment meted out to him by the Collector of Hamirpur, who had told Premchand that if he had lived in the Moghul times his hands would have been cut off, and also his desire to sue for defamation the Inspector of Schools who had called him "proud."

## Madhuri and Libel

THE SARASWATI PRESS, meanwhile, continued to be in a bad state, and Premchand had to work very hard in an effort to put it on a sound footing. A good deal of his time was devoted to the reading of proofs and to the resolving of problems relating to the managerial side of his press.

Even his incursion into the field of publishing had resulted only in losses. Not only was he obliged to place his novels and collections of short stories with other publishers, e.g. the Ganga Pustak Mala of Lucknow and the Bhargava Publishing House of Banaras, but also a large part of his earnings from these publishers—and translation work—had to be ploughed back into the Saraswati Press. In the circumstances, it was natural that he should be forced to take up some employment. Bishan Narain Bhargava, proprietor of the Navalkishore Press of Lucknow, who was through with Dularelal Bhargava of Ganga Pustak Mala, and Rup Narain Pandey—the two persons who edited *Madhuri* for him—offered Premchand the post of Associate Editor to assist Krishna Bihari Mishra. The salary offered, and accepted, appears to have been in the range of two hundred rupees a month. The amount, according to Bishan Narain Bhargava, apparently was not much for the association of a writer of Premchand's eminence with his publishing house. The author joined *Madhuri's* staff\* on February 15, 1927, and his family came to stay with him at his Marwari Gali house in July.

Premchand's association with *Madhuri* proved extremely useful in the sense that it enabled him to rebut allegations and charges levelled against him in conservative and rightist journals.

With the meteoric heights reached by Premchand in the Hindi world of letters by his novels ending with *Kayakalpa* (he was still busy writing *Ghaban*), there came into being a stiff

\*Premchand's name as Associate Editor appears for the first time in the issue of April 1927.



opposition to him from certain vested interests who wished to tear his hard-earned reputation to shreds. The leader of the anti-Premchand campaign was *Saraswati*. In fact, even *Madhuri* had earlier (in 1923) carried a very critical article by Hemchandra Joshi against Premchand's novel, *Premashram*. Having, however, published it, the journal had asked him to rebut the charges. Premchand asked one of his favourite pupils, Janardan Prasad Jha (Dwij), to send a rejoinder which he seems to have amended and corrected.

The principal contention of his critics was that, while his "last" novel was a masterpiece, his "latest" marked a sharp decline. Ila Chandra Joshi, for instance, said that while *Sevasadan* had placed new literary ideals before the Hindi readers, *Premashram* rendered no service whatsoever to literature. He disagreed with those who praised Premchand and launched a campaign "with all its fury."

While "Avadesh" in July 1926 issue compared *Rangabhoomi* to Rabindranath Tagore's *Chokher Bali*, another critic, Avadh Upadhyaya,\* published a series of articles, entitled "Premchand's 'originality': parallelism in *Premashram* and *Resurrection* and *Rangabhoomi* and *Vanity Fair*" in *Saraswati* from August 1927 to December 1927. *Premashram*, he contended, was merely a Hindi version of *Resurrection* and *Rangabhoomi* that of *Vanity Fair*, and—later on—*Kayakalpa* of the *Eternal City*! Premchand, according to Upadhyaya, had drawn heavily on

\*Upadhyaya, on the death of Premchand, wrote in a repentant mood from Paris that he had enjoyed the hospitality of Premchand and his wife on numerous occasions and had never intended to throw mud at the author's face. His intention was to persuade Premchand that the path that he had come to follow was the wrong one. "As Premchand could not be persuaded, I decided to write about it solely with the intention of provoking a controversy, so that Premchand could get a chance to reply to the criticism and thus set up conventions of healthy criticism in Hindi literature."

The essay as originally planned, according to Upadhyaya, was to highlight both the good and the bad points in Premchand's works. "In fact, I had desired to deal with his strong points first, and his weak points later. But a friend of mine advised me to publish my criticism first, and to detail Premchand's strong points later. I succumbed to his advice." When Premchand, accompanied by Ramrakh Singh Sehgal, editor of *Chand*, called on him and asked him to stop this series of articles, says Upadhyaya, he stopped it. His views in their totality could not, therefore, be placed before the reading public.

European literature and attempted to transplant something that could not strike roots in the Indian soil. He alleged plagiarism, too, and advised Premchand to give up his new approach of *Premashra Rangabhoomi* and *Kayakalpa* and to get back to the style and content of *Sevasadan* and *Nav Nidhi*.

Upadhyaya's articles led to a controversy, the heat and din of which continued for several years. It pained Premchand deeply. He rebutted the arguments of Upadhyaya. "There is nothing in common between *Vanity Fair* and *Rangabhoomi*," he wrote. "Though I have heard a good deal of praise of *Resurrection*, I have not yet read it. To say that *Premashram* is an imitation of *Resurrection* would, therefore, be the height of ridicule. The sort of similarities and parallelisms which Upadhyaya mentions are present in most books. A character in *Vanity Fair*, he says, speaks incorrect English and, therefore, provides the model for the Bengali-speaking character in *Rangabhoomi*. Obviously, Upadhyaya does not understand why this character has been introduced in *Rangabhoomi*. He also thinks that Sophia is modelled on Amelia. In fact, however, Sophia's character is taken from Annie Besant." Elsewhere he wrote that while *Vanity Fair*'s theme was "social," that of *Rangabhoomi* was "political."

Surdas' character, according to Premchand, was taken from a blind beggar who sat at a little culvert just outside Lamhi on the road to Banaras. It was this beggar who would shout "ek paisa," "ek paisa," and run after passersby. The beggar must have indeed made an indelible impression on Premchand for he carried it in his mind for several years. One of his friends at Gorakhpur has told me that Premchand used to visit him for the purpose of talking to a blind neighbour of his. In fact, "he not only talked to him, but also took down copious notes."

With the injection of the Gandhian philosophy (in the post-Chauri Chaura era), this blind man- and not any character from European literature- became the hero of the 1,000-page epic, *Rangabhoomi*, considered by some to be his best book.

Upadhyaya, according to Premchand, was a "tool" in the hands of the priestly Brahmin class of Allahabad which disliked Premchand's caricatures, such as those of Motayram. But he was not the one to take things lying down. He continued his sketches. One of these entitled *Motayram Shastri*, published in *Madhur*

of January 1928, led to one of the well-known cases of defamation and created quite a stir in the Hindi literary world.

*Motayram Shastri* is the caricature of Motayram who, finding private coaching not very gainful, sets up practice as a quack vaid, even though he does not know anything of Ayurveda or any other system of medicine. He advertises lavishly and charges heavy fees, for, he says, customers have faith in one who charges heavy fees. He specialises in treating women, and particularly for the "unmentionable diseases." His clientele among the wives of the rich swells. One of them is a Rani with whom he starts flirtation. Caught red-handed and given a thrashing, he falls unconscious. The following morning he leaves the city of Lucknow.

The defamation suit based on this story was filed by one Saligram Shastri, a vaid of Lucknow, against Premchand and Krishna Bihari Mishra, editors of *Madhuri*, under Section 500/109 of the Indian Penal Code. His witnesses included three professors from Lucknow University and Dularelal Bhargava and Rup Narain Pandey, formerly of *Madhuri*. Bailable warrants were issued. Bishan Narain Bhargava, proprietor of the Navalkishore Press, supported the stand taken by Premchand and Mishra and arranged for the bail of the two editors on sureties of five hundred rupees each, and also their defence by eminent lawyers from Lucknow, Kanpur and Dehra Dun, "one or two of them hired at the rate of nine hundred rupees per day." In the meantime, the January 1928 issue of *Madhuri*, which carried the story, was much in demand. Consequently, the story was reprinted in the issue of May 1928. The issue, however, could not be sent out pending a decision in the case fixed for April 12, 1928. According to Shivrani Devi's account, the magistrate's court room was packed to capacity. The magistrate dismissed the case, and advised the complainant to "quietly leave the court through the backdoor." The issue of *Madhuri* for May was sold out "like hot cakes."

This was not the end. Premchand continued his broadsides. In another story, *Sampadak Motayram Shastri*\* (*Madhuri* of August-September 1928), Motayram is caricatured as the editor of a self-owned journal. Chintaman, his "jeeves," is surprised

\*This story has not been published in any of the eight volumes of *Mansarovar* or other collections of short stories.

when he finds that the house of his friend, Motayram, is now converted into the office of a magazine, properly guarded by a watchman. Motayaram poses as a great editor and boasts to his friend that he has made a success of his life. He claims to have built up a circulation of 25,000 (when, in fact, it is only 500 or so). Chintaman, of course, is not taken in; he cross-examines Motayram. In the meantime, Motayram's wife tells Chintaman the truth by showing him the ledger.

## Mantra and other Stories

AS IN KANPUR, so in Lucknow, Premchand had a group of Hindi writers and journalists whom he would meet daily, join in "dahi bada and matar" treats at "Kachalu Rasilevale's" shop at one end of Aminabad Park, and then take a stroll. The group which consisted of Krishna Bihari Mishra, Rup Narain Pandey, Professors Daya Shankar Dubey and Badri Nath Bhatt, would discuss all topics of the day. In fact, it were these meetings, or those with the visiting friends at his house, which provided him with the grist to his literary mill.

Those who were familiar with him at that time have said that Premchand often got the basic themes of his short stories from events, observations and experiences narrated by others. Some articles, letters and notes left behind by him also seem to indicate, as we shall see later, that incidents from actual life or events from history which moved him, often provided him with the material for his short stories. The shorter ones, it has been said, were sometimes written within a couple of hours after the evening sessions would end. He would get down immediately to writing and complete the draft of the story at one sitting - which means, in other words, that while he conversed with his friends, he was mentally working out the details of the plot and characters. As we have seen above, he was involved in a defamation suit for apparently basing his stories relating to Motayram Shastri on characters taken from actual life.

At times, even current legends relating to persons and places provided him with the necessary material. A short story entitled *Pisanhari ka Kuan*, for instance, seems to have been based on a legend attached to one of the well-known Banaras road crossing known as "Pisanharia ka Kuan" and located close to the place where Premchand lived and also to the premises where his Saraswati Press was located. The story is woven round an old widow Gomati's efforts for constructing a well in memory of her

husband. She works hard, grinds a maund of wheat a day and saves some two thousand rupees. While on her death-bed, she gives the sum to the village *chaudhuri* in trust. The latter's son, who is in business, invests the money in his own trade. The *chaudhuri* is conscious of his own commitment and persuades the son to return the money to him. The son's financial position, however, is not too good, and he attempts to steal the money from his father's room at night. But there stands the figure of Gomati, the *pisanhari*. He flees. Next day, the *chaudhuri*'s wife also attempts to get the money, but Gomati is there as a guard. Within a few years, the *chaudhuri* dies. So does his son and his wife. There thus remains only the pregnant widow of the son. The girl born to her grows. One day she starts digging a well. Other village children also join her. She is threatened, but continues to dig the well at the place where the *pisanhari* had lived. The villagers are moved. The well is constructed. On the first day, there on its platform sleeps the little girl, to be found dead the following morning. The villagers say, she was Gomati reborn, and they named the well *Pisanharia ka Kuan*.

*Mandir* is the moving story of a Harijan widow whose son, the only one, is gravely ill. She sees her husband in a dream, and he asks her to pray to the idol in the village temple for the recovery of her son. The child's condition improves next day, and she feels that it is due to the blessings of the temple idol. On the worsening of his condition, subsequently, she gets perturbed, ascribes it to her dereliction of duty and pawns her last ornaments, for two rupees, to do the worship. Half of the amount she spends on flowers and incense, etc. with which she goes to the temple. The Brahmin priests refuse to allow her to "pollute" the temple by her entry and the idol by her touching its feet. She waits. After their prayers she tries again, but the chief priest still does not allow her to touch the feet of the idol. He does, however, accept her gift and also one rupee, in return for which he gives her a charm. Past midnight, when the child is dying, she rushes to the temple with him. Finding the gates locked, she breaks open the door. The priests who are aroused from sleep, thrash her. One of them hits her. The child also is thrown off her lap and dies. She collapses and dies of shock—the mother and the son thus lying dead in the house of God guarded by the priests!

*Mantra* highlights the good and humane qualities of the poor people and the artificiality and meanness of the so-called civilised society. Dr. Chadha is callous to the entreaties of a poor man whose seventh, and last, son is dying. Dr. Chadha is callous because he must not miss his golf! The old man is disappointed and does not go to another doctor. His last son thus dies.

With little interest in life left, the old man, called Bhagat, lives with his wife by making ropes or cutting grass. He is, however, an expert on snakes, and, as laid down by *dharma*, cures numerous cases of snake-bite gratis. Then Dr. Chadha's only son is bitten by a snake while he exhibits his knowledge of the science of snakes on his birthday celebration. All attempts to bring him back to life fail. At the dead of night, Bhagat is informed by a night watchman that the doctor's son—his only one—is dying and that Bhagat could make money if he saved him! Bhagat tries to show that it is God's revenge on the doctor who refused to attend on his son. Because of his inherent goodness, however, Bhagat goes and treats the son, without disclosing his own identity!

*Agni Samadhi* is the story of a peasant who, after an argument with his wife, leaves the house and returns with another wife. The two women quarrel and the first wife leaves. Soon afterwards, the peasant sees that his thatched hut in the field is on fire, rushes there, uproots it, puts it on his staff and runs, so as to save the crop. He is about to be buried in this mound of fire when his first wife appears from somewhere and takes the burden on. It is she who is buried in the grave of fire.

*Saut* is on the same lines as his *Agni Samadhi*. The ending, however, is different. The discarded wife leaves the husband's house to which she has brought prosperity, and makes a place for herself in the nearby village. While she prospers, the husband's wealth and health fail. When he is on the death-bed, she hears of it and comes rushing. The husband repents and dies. The discarded wife, however, "adopts" her husband's young wife as her own daughter and looks after her and her son as her husband would have liked to. It is out of love for her deceased husband!

*Algyojha* is the story of a young man whose father marries again and dies, leaving behind a young widow and four sons by

her. The stepmother at first does not trust her stepson's attachment and affection for her own children. Within a few months, however, she sees that he is very deeply attached to them. When the stepson gets married, the atmosphere in the house changes. The daughter-in-law forces a division in the family, much to the annoyance of the husband. Later, when the stepson dies and his widow is left alone, the mother-in-law who had looked upon her stepson as the protector of her children, not only comes to her aid, but also persuades her own son to marry the stepbrother's widow.

*Do Sakhiyan* is the story of two friends, written in the form of thirteen letters, showing opposing viewpoints on marriage, on the way to make life happy through service to the husband, and on the ways of tackling problems that arise in everyday life. While the conservative one believes in serving the in-laws and winning them over by love and service, the other one, believing in equality and freedom of woman, comes to grief and gets her husband back only through the help of another (third) woman who tells the wife the same things as are practised by the conservative one.

In *Suhag ka Shav*, a newly-married youngman, encouraged by his wife, goes to the U.K. for further studies and falls in love with another woman there. The wife gets worried by the changed tone of his letters, herself secretly goes to London and starts living there on her own without his knowing it. For her living, she stitches clothes. To her comes the fiance who is going to marry her husband. She not only does not reveal her identity but also attends the wedding from a hidden corner. She also gives away all her ornaments to the second wife of her husband. The husband, seeing her later, is stunned and speechless. That night he goes to her flat to explain his position. But she is gone, having left behind a packet containing her *suhag ki sari*, *sindoor* and a letter telling the husband's second wife to consign this "funeral of my suhag" to the Thames.

*Abhilasha* is the story of a woman's attachment to her husband, her prayers for being together and their fulfilment. Such is the degree of her attachment that when someone is dragging her husband—in a dream—she cries.

*Vidrohi* is the story of romance since childhood days of a boy and a girl, both of the middle class. The boy's uncle who is



his guardian and adopted father, tells the girl's father that he was being offered a dowry of eight thousand rupees and that, in view of their association, he would accept only five thousand. The girl's father is pained at this new development, for he has been under the impression that the relationship had been taken for granted. The boy, who has now entered the army, leaves home in disgust at his uncle's demand for dowry. The news of his sweetheart's marriage to someone else perturbs him. He loses heart and goes to see the girl, without taking leave from his regiment (he is very upset and confused) and is court-martialled. Fallen on evil days, he is once invited by the husband of the girl he loved to their house and finds that they are kind to him and appreciate the true Platonic love that he had displayed.

*Daroga* is a story, in a lighter vein, showing the duplicity exhibited by police inspectors who as a class are corrupt even in love and marriage.

*Kaptan Sahib* is the story of a good-for-nothing son of a postal clerk. The youth makes a nuisance of himself and steals things from the house and sells them. Once he steals an insured packet of money from his father's pocket and runs away to Bombay. While his father is sentenced for embezzlement to a long term of imprisonment, the son enlists in the army, is sent to Aden and thence to Baghdad during World War I. Meanwhile, the postal clerk's wife and daughters die. The son returns to India with full honours and the rank of captain and meets and honours his father when the latter is released from prison.

*Ghar Jamai* portrays the pitiable plight of a son-in-law who stays at his in-laws'. Even though he works the hardest of all, he finds that he is an unwelcome guest and considered a parasite. None of them including his wife, has any respect for him. He gets so fed up that he leaves his wife and returns to his stepmother—from whom he had separated to give his share to his father-in-law—and is welcomed by all in the village.

*Prerana* shows how the course of life of a mischievous pupil who is a terror to all his fellow pupils and teachers, is changed through the influence of a cousin who, through love and attachment, is responsible for the inculcation of discipline which enables him to work hard and succeed in the Indian Civil Service. He comes to a village and touches the feet of the teacher who, once afraid of him, had become so attached that he wept at the farewell.

*Istifa* shows how the courage of a peon and his wife's concept of self-respect arouse a helpless clerk in the collector's office to take up cudgels against his British boss in defence of his self-respect. He makes the Englishman apologise for having humiliated him and take a vow that he would never humiliate others.

*Durasha*, in the form of a short drama, attempts to show to what ridiculous limits the purdah system can go—in this case a clerk's disgrace in sending away hungry friends whom he has invited to dinner at his house because the purdah-observing wife had no matches to light the fire to cook the food and would not go to the market to buy it, the husband being away in the office and there being none else in the house.

*Prayashchitta* is the story of how amends are made by a clerk who has cheated his former classfellow and friend. The clerk has always been jealous of his friend who has been to the war front and has made money and who lives well, now to become the secretary of the district board where the clerk is working. Getting an opportunity, the clerk steals five thousand rupees from the room of the secretary who trusts him. Unable to make up for the loss, the secretary commits suicide. The clerk's conscience is now aroused, for, his action has been responsible for the boss's death. He accepts the friend's wife as a sister and takes her family to his own house and maintains them.

In a filler, *Doosari Shadi*, a father, who has pledged to his dying wife not to re-marry for the happiness of his two-year-old son, is persuaded to marry the girl of a good family because he is made to feel that she will be kind to the son by his first wife. But all stepmothers are alike. The father sees in his four-year-old son's eyes the anguish born out of tyranny, and feels remorseful for having broken his pledge. The only way now open is to send the son to his grandfather's. And this is what the father does.

*Ghaasvali* portrays the hard life of a poor but pretty Harijan woman whose husband is a tonga-driver. Although belonging to a class of which the rich take advantage, she snubs a rich thakur who makes advances to her. Her snubbing is responsible for bringing about a transformation in the life of the thakur who apologises to the woman and wants her honour to be defended. He even tells her husband that he should not send his wife to the market place to sell grass and, in fact, offers him a job.

*Qanuni Kumar* is the character sketch of a superficial M.L.A. who has an obsession for drafting—at least wishing to draft—laws for almost everything under the sun: for banning the use of tobacco by children, for a bill to remove purdah, for a bill to ban beggary, and so on and so forth. The wife of the M.L.A. also wants the husband to move a bill to ensure that every husband gives half his salary to the wife and stays at home with his wife the whole day through!

*Kavach* is the story of awakening of the conscience of a trusted employee of a raja who wants the former to go and murder the lover of one whom he is wooing. Attracted by the prospects of wealth and promotion, the employee at first agrees. Before proceeding on the nefarious errand, however, his gaze at his mother's portrait makes him change his mind and to back out of his commitment. He conveys his decision to the raja who is annoyed. The employee has to clear out of the dominions of the raja.

*Aaga Peechha* is the story of a romance between a prostitute's cultivated and charming daughter, whom everyone spurns, and a Harijan boy, who has worked his way to higher education. The hostility of the boy's parents is overcome by the girl's devotion to them, but the boy, in the meantime, is overcome by a strange obsession which leads him to death almost on the day scheduled for his wedding.

*Subhagi* is the story of a young girl who becomes a widow at an age when she does not even know what marriage means. Neighbours wish that she should get married again, but she prefers to serve her parents. Her brother and his wife, however, are jealous of her and consider her a burden. Her brother forces a division of the family's assets between himself and his wife, on the one hand, and the parents and his sister on the other. The relations are so strained that the son does not come to see the father even on his death-bed, and it is the daughter who performs the last rites by incurring heavy debts from one who, although of another caste, has been her father's friend. Her mother too dies and she borrows more money to perform her last rites also. She works extremely hard to clear off the debts to the last pic. The creditor is so impressed with her hard work that he persuades her to marry his own son.

*Unmad* is the story of a young man whose wife's sacrifice makes it possible for him to get higher training in espionage abroad.

While in another country he claims to be unmarried and marries an English woman, through whom he is able to secure a high post in India on his return. The British wife, however, is differently constituted, and the two are temperamentally incompatible. Differences between the two lead to his resigning the job and to return home. His wife welcomes him. Follows the British girl who threatens to shoot him. In fact, however, it is he who shoots himself.

*Maan* reflects the hardships undergone by patriots sentenced to long terms of imprisonment (and the terrible conditions of the Indian prisons). One of them contracts tuberculosis and walks out of the prison, only to meet his wife and to die in her arms. The wife's only ambition now is that the only child, a son, should take after the father and serve the nation. Despite her guidance, however, the son wishes to accept a scholarship for studies abroad, so that he could become a judge (like the one who sentenced his father). The idea is revolting to the mother who opposes him. In sheer disgust, she agrees to his going abroad, only because she knows that her wishes would make him unhappy. She now transfers her love to all living beings—human and animal.

*Khuchad* shows how the second (young) wife of a headstrong and domineering husband, who nags his wife in regard to whatever she does, makes him feel that he must change his habits if the house is to be run and domestic peace maintained.

*Sati* is the story of the fidelity of the pretty wife of a very ugly man whose cousin, who is handsome, tries to seduce her. The husband entertains some doubts about her devotion to him and wishes her not to admit him into the house. The doubts are cleared when he is on the death-bed. The woman is so devoted that she spurns the offer of her husband's cousin, now a widower, for she must be true to the memory of her husband "who would not have married again should I have died."

The above, and some of the earlier stories, were published in *Prem Chaturthi* brought out by the Hindi Pustak Agency of Calcutta, in *Prem Tirtha* and *Panch Phool* published by his own Saraswati Press and in *Agni Samadhi* published by the Naval-kishore Press of Lucknow, as also in some of the Urdu collections. Off and on Premchand did translations or adaptations also. *Parvat Yatra*, for instance, is based on Ratan Nath Sarshar's *Scir-i-Kohsaar*.

THE THEME OF Premchand's next novel, *Ghaban*, relates in a way to the earliest period of his authorship, e.g. the theme of woman's excessive fondness for ornaments, which was the theme of *Kishna*. The plot was possibly rewoven and new ideas introduced. These brought it into line with the tempo of the times.

Referring to this novel which appears to have been started in 1926-27 and completed by the end of 1928—for, in February 1929, he was busy with his *Karmabhoomi*—Premchand characterised it as a "social novel." "I am old-fashioned and follow the old ways," he said. "It is difficult for me to begin a story in the middle, or to begin it in a way so as to introduce the element of drama in it."

The hero's father, Dina Nath, a petty official who is now old, has made a fetish of honesty. He expects his son, Rama Nath, also to be honest and to live within his means. Like others of his class, however, Dina Nath puts up a good show on the occasion of his son's marriage, and gets ornaments, other than a necklace, on credit. While the bride, Jalpa, who has been dreaming of a necklace since her childhood days, is disappointed, creditors want payment. Dina Nath does not know what to do and asks Rama Nath to ask Jalpa to return some of them. Rama Nath, however, steals the ornament box at night and gives it to his father to return the ornaments to the jeweller. He steals them because he dares not ask his wife whom he has told that the family is very well off.

Now that he has a wife, the good-for-nothing Rama Nath becomes a clerk in the local octroi department on a small salary of thirty rupees a month. His wife, brought up in comfort, likes to dress well and move in higher social circles. This costs money which is beyond Rama Nath's means. To meet the growing needs, therefore, Rama Nath accepts small bribes with which he buys her a watch, saris and presents. Jalpa has been pining

for a necklace and he gets one on credit. He also gets her a pair of bangles. Jalpa cultivates the friendship of Ratan, the young wife of an old lawyer. Ratan likes Jalpa's ornaments and gives Rama Nath Rs. 600 to buy her a pair of bangles for herself. Rama Nath gives the money to the jeweller as advance. The jeweller, however, adjusts it against his debts for Jalpa's bangles and wants him to clear off the account before he gives the new bangles. Ratan wants the bangles or her money back. Rama Nath evades Ratan's enquiries and reminders. But she gives an ultimatum. One day he sits up late so as to bring the office cash to the house to show it to Ratan and then to return it to the office next day. His plan miscarries because he goes out and Jalpa uses this money to return Ratan's. Rama Nath is now in a fix. He is afraid of the charge of embezzlement. He explains it to Jalpa in a letter and then feels so ashamed of himself that he runs away from his house and catches the first available train which is bound for Calcutta. In the train he forms a friendship with Devi Din, a low caste co-passenger, who is a green grocer in Calcutta. Rama Nath poses as a Brahmin and stays with Devi Din whom he teaches English, and is all the time obsessed with the fear of police pursuing him with warrants of arrest. He does not know that, at home, Jalpa has sold off her ornaments to pay off her husband's obligations.

Her only friend left is Ratan, the young wife of the aged lawyer. Within a few months of Rama Nath's disappearance, Ratan takes her husband to Calcutta where he dies.

Devi Din is proud of his two sons killed as a result of injuries received in a lathi-charge on picketers of foreign cloth shops. Devi Din cremated them, "came and stood for eight days on the spot where they had fallen until the shopkeepers promised on the ninth day that they won't sell foreign cloth."

Devi Din now puts on pure khadi and uses India-made goods. He ascribes the "failure" of the nationalist movement to the "so-called leaders" who claim to be great servants of the nation but cannot do without foreign liquor. "Go to their houses and you will not find a single India-made piece. In order to show off, however, they will have a dozen or a score of khadi clothes. But everything else in their houses is foreign made."

Meanwhile, Devi Din has helped Rama Nath set up a tea shop so that he may become independent financially. Rama Nath

goes to a cinema and is, as is usual with him, frightened at the sight of three policemen.

Taking advantage of his hang-dog look, the three police constables arrest him. Rama Nath confesses his guilt of embezzlement. Reference over phone by the police to Rama Nath's home town, however, leads to the information that there is no charge against Rama Nath. The police, however, withhold this information from him. This is because they are in need of an "approver" in a dacoity case and, as usual with them, they coax him to become one, even though he knows next to nothing about the case. He is within their grip and they hold out the prospects of a bright future for him.

Jalpa traces Rama Nath's whereabouts through a chess puzzle, goes to Calcutta and contacts him. She asks him not to give evidence against innocent people. But Rama Nath is determined to carve out a career for himself at the cost of the life of a few others. The police have provided him with all luxuries (including a prostitute, Zohra). And he tells this to Devi Din. Says Devi Din: "If someone had offered me a lakh of rupees to become an approver, I would never have agreed. How would a stranger know the truth, or know who is guilty or not guilty. With the culprits would be many innocents." And an Indian magistrate, according to Devi Din, is subservient to the police. "Had there been a British judge, he would have given a warning to the police."

Rama Nath's evidence leads to a dozen people being sentenced to long terms of imprisonment and one to death. Consequently, he becomes the object of popular derision.

Says Devi Din's wife, Jaggo, to Rama Nath: "If you were my son, I would have poisoned you. Your very sight causes me pain. Go away from here. To hell with the woman who has given birth to such a one. And you now dare bring presents—earnings of sin—to your wife? Had you been killed by the police, she would have worshipped your image; she would have drunk the water used for washing your feet. She is one of those women who will bear all the hardships, but not a wrong done to someone who is innocent." A stranger in the court says that "selfish people like him" are like Satan and should be "shot dead."

And Jalpa, his own wife, would not forgive him. "You are shameless," she says. "You have no right to call yourself a man." In order to wash the sins of her husband—which ultimately are

the result of her craving for ornaments and "high life"—Jalpa goes to serve voluntarily in the house of Dinesh, the one who had been sentenced to death. No woman, she says, is as unfortunate as she. And she raises a fund to help Dinesh's family—his wife, two small children and an aged mother.

Jalpa's uprightness makes Rama Nath feel ashamed of his actions. He realises the injustice he has done to others. And he goes and informs the judge about the extortion of evidence under duress. The sentences are ultimately quashed. As expiation, however, Rama Nath goes back to the soil, with Jalpa, Devi Din, Zohra and the young widow Ratan. Ratan dies in poverty. Zohra is washed away in a flood. And it is on this note that the novel ends.

*Ghaban* conveys to us a feeling of the march of times in which it was written—the subservience of the Indian judiciary, the absolute powers of the police, the people's contempt for approvers in "faked" trials, the sacrifices of the common people who took the national liberation struggle forward, and the hypocrisy of the so-called leaders.

While Premchand was busy writing his novel *Ghaban*, and subsequently *Karmabhoomi*, he undertook translation work too. He thus translated three of Galsworthy's plays—*Justice*, *Strife* and *Silver Box*—into Hindi for the Hindustani Academy. He also translated parts of Jawaharlal Nehru's *Glimpses of World History* (or *Letters from a Father to His Daughter*) into Hindi, on a request by Acharya Narendra Deva. The first few pieces, it seems, were approved by Nehru himself, and the book was to be published by the Allahabad Law Journal Press.

While still in Lucknow, we find Premchand asking Daya Narain Nigam to get him translation work from the Osmania University which had set up a bureau to arrange for translations into Urdu. Nothing seems to have come out of this request.



## Urdu Publishers Take Note

THE RESPONSE WHICH Premchand's Urdu books elicited was nowhere in comparison with the tremendous acclaim with which his Hindi works were received. This, however, did not reduce his interest in the progress of Urdu literature and of *Zamana*.

Thus, when Daya Narain Nigam devoted most of the November 1929 issue of *Zamana* to an assessment of the poetical works of Haidar Ali "Atish," Premchand wrote to Nigam: "At present, when so many moral, political, social and economic issues continuously engage our attention, I feel very sorry that almost the entire issue of *Zamana* has been devoted to a criticism of Atish's poetry. Even though I am myself a great admirer of Atish's craftsmanship, I feel that his poems would appear to be very much below the correct standards and taste. Literature aims at giving expression to moral values, true emotions, realities. Should we then really pack the entire issue with such juvenile verses?" "

Premchand also got involved in a controversy about translations into Urdu by Hindu writers. Some Muslim editors maintained that only Muslims could write good Urdu and that, therefore, the translators engaged by the Hindustani Academy for the purpose must be Muslims and not Hindus. Among those referred to was Daya Narain Nigam of *Zamana*, who had been asked by the Academy to translate Galsworthy's *Justice*, *Strife* and *Silver Box* into Urdu.

Nigam, it seems, asked Premchand to do the Urdu translations for him. Enquiries made seem to indicate that only the Urdu version of *Justice* was published (as *Insaf*)—and that too several years later. This translation was done by Premchand with the assistance of Babu Har Prasad Saxena.

"I have started work on *Justice* and have done some 6/7 pages already," Premchand informed Nigam in February 1929. "As its Hindi translation is not at hand, the initial difficulties that one

has to experience and solve by referring to dictionary are coming up. Till, therefore, the Hindi version is not received, I'll postpone the Urdu version." Later: "Somehow or the other, I'll do the *Justice*, but I would like to withdraw from the commitment in regard to the other two. This is because during the time to be devoted to this work, I can do something more paying. Would you kindly undertake the work yourself?"

In April 1929: "*Justice* has been faired. *Silver Box* is on the way to completion. I am sure you must have started on the *Strife*." Neither *Silver Box* nor *Strife*, however, appeared in Urdu.

Premchand, who was thus indirectly involved, took up the gauntlet on behalf of Nigam and hit back through the columns of *Zamana* against what he called "Pharaohism (haughtiness) in Urdu." Hindus and Muslims, he maintained, had made an equally weighty contribution to Urdu literature which was a common heritage. He pointed not only to the ridiculousness but also to the grave dangers inherent in the stand taken by the critics who tended to identify Urdu with Islam.

More Urdu publishers any way were now coming forward to undertake the publication of Premchand's Urdu collections of short stories and his novels, as also a few other books. While Premchand himself published *Khak-i-Parvana* (16 short stories), Ram Narain Lal, a publisher of Allahabad, published the biographical sketches by Premchand in a book entitled *Ba Kamaalon ke Darshan*, and Lajpatrai and Sons of Lahore published his *Ramcharcha*\* or the *Ramayana* for children, the Indian Press of Allahabad published *Firdaus-i-Khayal*\*\*, Lajpatrai and Sons brought out his *Khvab-o-Khayal*\*\*\* and the Gilani Electric Press of Lahore a reprint of Premchand's *Soz-i-Vatanaur Sair-i-Der-riish* and subsequently of *Nirmala* as also his last major collection of short stories, namely, *Prem Chalisi*.

\*It is interesting to note that when approached by B. D. Chaturvedi with a request to preside over the Tulsī Jayanti, he wrote: "I am the least fitted person for this work. To preside over a function about a work in which I have never taken any interest is ridiculous. I feel diffident. In fact, I have never read the *Ramayana* though. It is a shame to acknowledge this fact, but that is how it is."

\*\*As against the statement in *Zamana* of May 1928, that it had fourteen stories, it has only eleven.

\*\*\*According to *Zamana* of May 1928, it had sixteen stories; the published version available now has only fourteen.

While the Urdu collections *Khvab-o-Khayal*, *Khak-i-Parvana* *Firdaus-i-Khayal* and *Prem Chalisi* carried the Urdu version of many of the stories given in the pages above, there were also some which had appeared only in Urdu journals or were verbose character sketches, or mere "fillers."

*Bade Baboo* is the poetic pen-portrait of a queer character to whom a young man in search of a job goes. There is a discussion between the two on how to succeed in life but no way out is indicated.

*Trisul* shows how the appeal of an English lady in distress moves an Indian soldier to a degree that he ignores military regulations at some risk to his own future prospects and obeys the "moral law." No harm, however, comes to the man because the woman who is the commandant's daughter, has accepted him as her "brother."

*Devi* is a filler. It shows the good-heartedness of the poor, in this case a poor widow who finds a ten-rupee note and gives it to a *faqir* rather than keep it herself.

*Qaum ka Khadim*, again a filler, exposes the hypocrisy of some national leaders in regard to their propagation for the elimination of untouchability. So is *Band Darvaza*.

*Buhani*, a story in a lighter vein, shows to what ridiculous situation a shopkeeper's obsession with the good luck brought by the day's first customer can lead to — to harassing the customer even when he has changed his house.

*Naadaan Dost* shows the innocence of two children, a brother and a sister who, wishing to provide adequate shelter to sparrows and their eggs in hot weather, put a "cotton mattress" between the eggs and the straw of the nest. Contaminated by human hands, we are told, the eggs are considered no good and destroyed by the sparrows themselves.

So much in regard to Premchand's short stories of this period. To come to his novels, it is interesting to note that some of the publishers were now prepared to take up even reprints of the earlier novels of Premchand. The Indian Press of Allahabad, for instance, which had printed *Jalva-i-Isar*\* by "Navabrai" in 1912, now came out with its reprint (under Premchand's name). While the Gilani Electric Press\*\* of Lahore published his *Nirmala*,

\*Prescribed as a textbook for the Matriculation examination in U.P.

\*\*Proprietor Syed Mubarak Ali Shah Gilani told the writer in 1941 that

Lajpatrai and Sons published *Parda-i-Majaz* (the Urdu version of *Kayakalpa*) and *Ghaban*.

The Urdu translation of *Kayakalpa* and *Ghaban*, it seems, was done by Premchand himself. His experience of getting his *Rangabhoomi* translated back into Urdu had not been too happy. By March 1926, he had already paid Sahr Hitgami a hundred and fifty rupees, with a promise to pay another fifty rupees. This expenditure on translation from Hindi into Urdu was only an investment and was to be realised only after the publication of his *Gosha-i-Afiat* and *Chaugan-i-Hasti* which he had "sold" for eight hundred rupees to Darul Ashayat of Lahore.

Premchand was obviously in no position to go on investing money in translations of his books from Hindi into Urdu in the hope of realising the investment with some probable profit later on. He could as well translate his works from Hindi into Urdu himself.

An admirer of Premchand's Hindi works, we are told, was once intrigued to see a bundle of Urdu manuscripts by his side, and asked Premchand if he still kept up his interest in Urdu.

"Of course," said Premchand. "I do."

"You mean you still write in Urdu?"

"Yes, I do. While my mornings are devoted to writing in Hindi, my evenings are devoted to Urdu."

Thus, while Premchand's evenings were devoted to translations from Hindi to Urdu of *Kayakalpa* and *Ghaban*, the mornings were more or less earmarked for the writing of *Karmabhoomi*.

it was with difficulty that he was able to persuade Premchand to allow him to publish his works. He offered Premchand, he said, the rate of one rupee two annas per page of nineteen lines (as against the usual page of 21 lines offered by the other publishers). His stocks of the first edition, he revealed, still lay unsold, and he was prepared to sell them at cost price to Premchand's successors.

KARMABHOOMI, STARTED IN 1929, and completed in 1931,\* begins by a severe criticism of the educational system in India. "The great compulsion with which fees are collected in schools and colleges surpasses the hardships experienced even in the collection of revenues. . . . What can be the objective of such strict rules but to drive away the children of the poor from these institutions? The same heartless bureaucracy which dominates government offices also dominates the working of our educational institutions. . . . Money reigns supreme in our educational institutions as in the courts with greater rigidity and with greater hardship. If you are late, you are fined; if you are unable to buy books, you are fined; if you commit a mistake, you are fined. Is it an educational institution or an institution to impose fines? That, then, is the object of Western education which is being praised to the skies. Is it any wonder, then, that these institutions turn out pupils who sell their lives for money, who would strangle the poor and who would sell their soul for a mess of pottage."

What is necessary for success in life, says one of the characters, is not a degree but education. "The real degree that we need is that of humility, service and simplicity. If we do not have this degree, i.e. if our conscience is not awakened, the paper degree is worthless."

Amarkant, the hero of the novel, hates this system of education. Seeing the professors as slaves to fashion, demeaning themselves for their selfish ends, doing the least amount of work to secure the maximum benefits, he would feel mental anguish. "Professors and teachers are not concerned with the fact that the masses of India live on two annas a day, that a common citizen of the country does not get more than fifty rupees a

\*A date mentioned on one of the pages of the manuscript of the novel is April 16, 1931.

month. . . . These teachers are in no way behind an ordinary trader or a government servant. They are also corrupted by the same lust for money and power and the same weaknesses. Our educational institutions are only appendages of the government. Being themselves steeped in darkness, how can they spread light?"

Amarkant, the hero of the novel, is unable to pay his school dues in time because his rich father, Samarkant, is very miserly. Amarkant is able to continue his education only because of the help of Salim, his friend, who either lends him, or gives him money.

Samarkant, who inherited a little mud hut, has earned enough to become a rich moneylender-cum-shopkeeper through exorbitant rates of interest and through buying and selling stolen goods. He does not spend more than the minimum even in regard to his son's education which he considers a waste of money. Samarkant has married twice. His first wife died leaving him a son, Amarkant, and his second wife a daughter, Naina.

Amarkant, unlike the father, is an idealist. He does not approve of his father's ways and refuses to buy stolen goods from Kale Khan at one-fourth the price. His father is furious. "What do you want to do for a living? Is there any profession wherein you don't have to kill your conscience? In every trade, I tell you, there are malpractices. He who understands these ways, can make money. Otherwise, one would go bankrupt. And tell me of a profession wherein one doesn't have to tell lies or accept bribes. All the big officers accept bribes." The most important thing in life, according to Samarkant, is to make money, no matter how. Demands of conscience can be met by being "religious," in other words, by visiting the temple and giving alms to Brahmins. He himself spends a thousand rupees on a *katha*.

Amarkant spins yarn, puts on khadi and is interested in doing social and political work. Even before he completes his education, his father sees to it that he is married to Sukhada, the only child of a very wealthy widow. Sukhada is domineering, vain, and - unlike her husband—an extrovert. She wants him to live like the sons of other wealthy people and help his father in his work of running the shop rather than wasting his time on spinning yarn, attending political meetings and helping the poor whose living conditions he surveys along with his teacher, Shanti Kumar, and his friend and class-fellow, Salim.

Once when Amarkant, his teacher and his friend are visiting a village, they see about a dozen terrified and speechless people looking in the direction of a field under a crop. Two British tommies are standing guard for the third tommy who has raped a woman. Amarkant and others are furious. When the tommy comes out, there is a scene. The three tommies are beaten up and sent to hospital. Says Salim: "These tommies, coming from the poorest families of England, dare do these things because India is enslaved, because they know that the people of this country have been thoroughly demoralized and would bear all that is inflicted on them. We shall have to awaken the people and arouse them to throw off the foreign yoke."

Sukhada, who is pregnant, persuades Amarkant to attend to business. His political activities lose their vigour. Amarkant starts even going to the shop and attending to his father's work.

One day, a "mad woman" stabs two tommies outside the shop. Their companion, a woman, is frightened. The "mad woman" is the same who had been raped by the three tommies six months earlier. "I didn't return home," she says, "because I could not show my face to anyone in the village. I don't know where I have been all these months. I became aware of my own self only after I had stabbed these two tommies. I don't say all this just because I am afraid of the gallows and wish to escape death. In fact, I pray to God to remove me from this world at the earliest. Life robbed of honour is not worth living." The "mad woman," Munni, is arrested and tried for murder. Her case becomes a live issue in the national liberation struggle. The judge's wife also feels for Munni.

Sukhada, even more than Amarkant, is also interested in the defence of Munni who is acquitted. The husband of Munni, with their child, appears on the scene, wishing to take her back and to worship her. But Munni is unwilling. "Please send me to the railway station," she says to Shanti Kumar, "and tell these people to go home. I don't wish my affection for my husband and my child to be their undoing."

In between, Amarkant has an affair with Sakina, the granddaughter of a *pathani* who is in the pay of Samarkant. At his instance, Sakina breaks off an engagement. "If I had not been married," says Amarkant, "and this restriction of religion had not been there, I would have married her and considered myself

lucky." Samarkant is ready to forgive him for his advances to her provided he is not serious about it. He opposes Amarkant's work as a member of the municipal board. Amarkant is forced to leave his home with his wife and his sister. He becomes a travelling salesman of khadi cloth, and carries it on his head, despite remonstrations by his wife (who herself takes up a job of a teacher on fifty rupees a month). The two do not get on well. When Samarkant falls ill, Sukhada returns to her father-in-law and attends on him. But Amarkant refuses to come back. "I have wasted many years of my life in this house, and don't wish to waste more. Man is not born just to live and die; nor is his aim the accumulation of wealth. My present condition is intolerable. I wish to start a new chapter in life." And he leaves Sukhada and goes to a predominantly Harijan village on the banks of the Ganga where he starts a school which becomes popular. He does uplift work, to expiate, as it were, the sins of his father. He helps the people to build their character and self-respect. He tries to remove ignorance and superstition. His work for the good of the community brings him the respect of the villagers. He has a mild affair with Munni who has found refuge and settled down in a Thakur's house.

Amarkant's work in the village opens the eyes of Sukhada who now comes to respect her husband's noble ideals. She herself jumps into the crisis precipitated by the severe beating given to the Harijans who have been listening to the recitation of *katha* which, according to Brahmins, is not meant to be heard by them. Found sitting in the back rows of the public, the Harijans are severely belaboured. Appeals on their behalf are of little avail. The caste Hindus are adamant. So, for that matter, are Harijans. *Satyagraha* is launched. Shanti Kumar, Naina and Sukhada, all jump into the movement. Naina tells the advocates of the caste system: "The ends of true religion are the same as the ends of truth. The temple has become a gamblers' den. Your very touch pollutes God whom you worship."

*Satyagraha* gathers momentum. There is a lathi-charge. Shanti Kumar is injured. Sukhada now enters the scene. Just then the Brahmins yield. Samarkant tells Sukhada that the temple has been thrown open to the Harijans. Shanti Kumar, now in hospital, is jealous of Sukhada because she has got all the credit and all the praise for which he has undergone injuries



in the cause. When Sukhada herself mentions the fact that the victory was because of his efforts, his vanity is tickled.

Shanti Kumar advises Salim who is going up for the Indian Civil Service examination, that any "government is unnecessary. It is a machinery to crush the poor. Once you eliminate the disparities between the rich and the poor, government will automatically disappear."

The temple entry movement again manifests itself in the movement for the construction of municipal quarters for workers on municipal land. When the board refuses to give the land, there is satyagraha. Amarkant's father, wife and sister are all drawn in, and arrested. Naina, who is leading the satyagraha, is shot dead by her husband in anger. She becomes a martyr. The municipal board ultimately yields.

While these movements are progressing in the city, in the countryside the rising exactions by the *mahant* from the poor tenants of the village where Amarkant resides, also lead to mounting tension. The mahant, unlike the usual zamindars, has the sanction of religion behind him. His levies are in the name of God. The tenants starve. Says one of them: "Our wants are few. All that we require is half a seer of foodgrains per head. The mahantji can take away all the rest." (The mahant's life is like that of a prince.) In desperation, the tenants think of starting a no-tax campaign. At a meeting of the *panchayat* on the bank of the Ganga, Swami Atmanand advocates besieging the mahant's house and coercion. Amarkant who has met the new district chief, his friend and class-fellow, Salim, stands for persuasion. He is afraid of the consequences of a no-tax campaign. Hasn't his friend Salim warned him: "This would indeed be bad for the tenants. Martial law will be imposed; pickets shall be posted in the villages; crops will be auctioned; lands will be confiscated." Amarkant, therefore, tries persuasion and goes to the suave mahant who shows ignorance of what has been exacted by his agents. The mahant promises to look into the matter. Amarkant is happy that persuasion and conciliation would succeed. But the mahant's assurances are mere lip sympathy. The no-tax campaign is precipitated. Follows a reign of terror. Many are injured; others leave the village. The people are chased from pillar to post. Saloni, an old woman in the village, is beaten up by Salim. The entire village

looks desolate. The people meet in secret and disperse at the mere sight of the policeman. Amarkant is arrested—by Salim. Hearing the news of Amarkant's arrest, his father, Samarkant, also visits the scene of terror. He is accosted by Salim, the architect of the reign of terror. Samarkant's jibes lead to a heart-searching on the part of Salim who now studies the actual conditions in the village which are much worse than what he had imagined. The value of the produce, he finds, is far less than the revenue to be paid. One could not have even food or clothes on the basis of produce in the days following the Great Depression.

Salim comes to have sympathy with the peasants and sends a report about their true conditions to the higher authorities. But his superior, Mr. Ghaznavi, disagrees with his views and his report. "All that we have to do is to obey the orders of our superiors. When they ask us to collect revenues, we have to carry out the orders. Whether it means hardship to the people or not, is none of our concern."

Salim, however, thinks that the officers have to serve the people. He insists that his report on the true conditions be sent to the higher authorities. The report when sent to the government, leads to the dismissal of Salim from service. Salim now joins the no-tax campaign and becomes a leader. Those who once cursed him now worship him. Even Saloni, who had been flogged by him, rushes to protect him!

Salim's joining the ranks of the movement, however, is no solution. Repression mounts. Salim's successor, Ghosh, is much more cruel. The situation takes a serious turn. When two policemen assault a woman, she takes up an axe and attacks them. Swami Atmanand asks for a revolver to shoot down the policeman. "I'll eat you up," says Salim to the policeman. And in the heat of the provocation he pulls down Ghosh and boxes him. Salim is arrested, and lodged with Amarkant and Samarkant in the Lucknow jail. (In the jail's female ward are Sakina, Sukhada and Munni.) Government is forced to climb down. All those convicted are released. A seven-man reconciliation board, with Amarkant and Salim as members and with a right to co-opt three others, is set up. Thus ends *Karmabhoomi*.

The novel, one of the major ones written by Premchand, introduces participation by women in political movements, and

also highlights such problems as untouchability\* which assumed serious proportions in the early thirties leading to Gandhiji's fast in disapproval of Ramsay McDonald's Communal Award relating to the depressed classes in September 1932 (by which time, incidentally, Premchand's novel had already been printed). This shows that Premchand was sufficiently agitated about the problem and had anticipated the importance it was assuming.

It is interesting to note that while, in the early pages of the manuscript of Part I, the names of principal characters mentioned are Amarnath and Samarnath, in the latter part, the names used are Amarkant and Samarkant. The names of the two principal characters mentioned in the published version are Amarkant and Samarkant. One possible explanation for this variance may be that Premchand's writing of the novel was frequently interrupted and that he was devoting part of his time to translations or preparation of collections of short stories, and returned to the novel after some lapse of time.

It is also interesting that the scene of the novel shifts from and to Delhi, Banaras and Lucknow. There are also several changes in the plot as originally conceived and finally executed. On the reverse side of one of the pages of the manuscript one finds:

"Sukhada forms her ministry. Amar cooperates wholeheartedly. No ill-will. They work together, and form plans together, but their private lives are apart from one another. Naina devotes herself to the personal comforts of Amar.

"The two bills are brought before the council. Both are defeated by jobbery and underhand dealings. Some most reliable friends succumb to temptations. (The ministry is short lived and dissolved.) And the interested parties find Amar their most uncompromising enemy and plot to assassinate him. Amar remains undaunted. The murderous attack comes. Munni saves Amar. This brings to the husband and wife the much sought for reconciliation. They are then disappointed with democracy and begin to work to set up a missionary institution of selfless workers with no axe to grind. This is the hope of the future.

\*Premchand had already drawn our attention to the problem of untouchability in his earliest important novel, *Sevasadan*, through the beating up of the *chamars* by agents of men who traded in religion. The problem was touched upon in *Rangabhoomi* and *Kayakalpa* also.

"Samar Nath gives away his all in charitable objects. His fortune is the nucleus of the funds required for new movements. Naina is leading her life of renunciation."

The synopsis given above, wherein the name mentioned is "Samar Nath" as opposed to "Samarkant," would indicate that while originally planning the novel, he wished to give it a turn different from what came out in the final shape.

It may also be mentioned that within the pages of the manuscript appears the synopsis in English of a proposed novel which perhaps remained only in the stage of preliminary planning.

It is in two bits. The first bit reads: "Two aspects—an unhappy married life due to difference in outlook and mentality. There is enthusiasm, sacrifice, devotion, but also a longing, a yearning for love. The heart is not awakened. There is no spiritual awakening. Wife's sacrifices create love. Spiritual awakening also comes. Then whole outlook changed. The whole atmosphere is purified."

The second, a synopsis of the first eight chapters, reads: "A youth sentenced to transportation in a political murder trial. His betrothed and father, both are transformed. When he returns he finds them ready to welcome him. All fears vanished. . . .

"The details should be worked out—160 pages. . . . Price -/12/-.

"1st chapter—the trial and punishment.

"2nd chapter—the betrothed girl was present at the court. She proposes to remain with the father of her fiancé. Her fiancé's farewell letter.

"3rd. (The police threaten the father but he is adamant. Father's temperament is quite revolutionised.)\* The father subscribes secretly to the fund of the political party and is ready to help in every way.

"4th. The secret is divulged by one of the party. The police threaten the father but he is adamant. His daughter-in-law encourages him.

"5th. The daughter-in-law attends a political meeting and is vociferously cheered. She is elected president of the Congress committee.

"6th. Lahore Congress—she attends and delivers a speech at Lahore. The resolution for independence. She supports it in an excellent speech.

\*The words in parenthesis are scored out.

"7th. The ratification; her efforts to form a lady workers union successful.

"8th. Picketing by the lady; and arrest.

"9th—."

The proposed novel, it appears, was lost sight of when Premchand wrote his next novel (*Godan*). The above synopsis is, however, significant in the sense that it shows that what moved Premchand at this time, when he was in Lucknow, was the then current political situation.

The degree of emotional involvement of Premchand into the then current political movement is clear from a letter written about the time Bhagat Singh and his comrades were hanged by the British imperialists. It reads: "I was wanting to attend the Karachi (session). Bhagat Singh's death by hanging has broken my heart. With what hopes could one go there now? People will hoot down Gandhi and the Congress will pass into the hands of irresponsible extremists, and there will be no place for us. What path we shall pursue is not clear. I have lost heart. The future is bleak. The events in Banaras, Mirzapur and Agra, I feel, will encourage the government. But no government could ever commit a greater stupidity. How deep an impact could the government have created, if it had commuted the death sentence (of Bhagat Singh and his comrades) into transportation for life? Its attitude, however, betrays that there has been no change of heart, and that the government is determined to go its irresponsible way."

## Life in Lucknow

PREMCHAND'S PRINCIPAL ASSIGNMENT in Lucknow was the editing of *Madhuri*. He was also associated with the work of the book department of Navalkishore Press, especially the preparation of books for children. Because of his membership of the Hindustani Academy's council, and his personal contacts with members of the textbook committee of the Education Board, he was at times asked by his employers to go to Allahabad, Nainital, Patna and Kanpur to get approved books produced by the Navalkishore Press.

But for a few visits outside Lucknow in connection with Navalkishore Press work, or attending literary gatherings including those organised by educational institutions, e.g. Gurukul Kangri in early 1928, he would generally stay at home. Unlike many others of his generation, he had adopted literature as a means of livelihood.

While Premchand did a full day's work in the Navalkishore Press, he devoted the mornings to the writing of *Ghaban* and subsequently of *Karmabhoomi*, and his evenings to short stories and translations of his own works into Urdu, as also to work for the nationalist movement of which he has given us a graphic account in his writings.

It is interesting to recall that when a British dignitary's visit to Lucknow was to be celebrated by a programme of fireworks and illuminations, estimated to cost about forty thousand rupees, Premchand felt pained. Such wasteful extravagance, he said, was "at the expense ultimately of the country's poor whose daily average income does not exceed six pice, who don't have clothes to cover their bodies and who do not have even two square meals a day."

"Every time the Indian princes visit Lucknow," Premchand said to his wife, "they donate a little amount to be pooled for being spent on the occasion of a visit by the Viceroy, or members

of the British Royal family. The amount spent in excess is then realised from the peasants and this sum, representing the latter's hard earned money, is burnt away like dirt. This is heartless. And all this is done, so that the Viceroy is pleased and awards a few titles."

"Why do the people agree to these exactions?"

"Because, otherwise, these intermediaries will eat them up."

"If they have to die, why should they not put up at least some sort of resistance?"

"Eighty per cent of the people in this country live on land. The remaining 20 per cent constitute the rich, the educated few, and the government servants." If all the people of India had the understanding and the strength, he added, "how could a handful of Englishmen have ruled India for 150 years? Our people have neither the understanding nor the strength. There is so much of ignorance that we do not even feel the pain. Gandhiji's solution is the only way out. If the course suggested by him is not followed, matters will get worse. A man gets the strength to defeat others only when he is himself prepared to die. . . . So long as a man is used to a life of comforts, he does not willingly give them up. In fact, his greed goes a step further. If, however, a man is convinced that he stands with his back against the wall, he is prepared for the worst.

"In fact, it is not the British who appeared on the Indian scene to levy taxes. It is the strong ones here who suck the blood of the poor. A little exploitation, I admit, prevails everywhere. Perhaps it is the law of the world that the strong should suck the blood of the poor. But there is the example of Russia where the exploiters have been put down. The poor in that country are happy and contented. Similar conditions would arise in our country also. . . . There is, of course, little hope yet of this happening soon. . . . Should, however, this come about, my place shall be with the workers and the peasants. I shall tell them all: 'Like you I am also a worker; you wield the spade, I drive the quill. We are equals.' "

"Would they believe you?" asked his wife. "And will it be all that easy?"

"When that happens, most of the people of this country would have become literate. Aren't there writers in Russia? There are, and their conditions are not only a few times better than

those of the writers in India, but are a hundred times better. I, for myself, pray for that day."

"You mean to say that the Russians will come here?"

"No. Russians won't come here. We ourselves shall get the strength that they have. The day when the workers and peasants rule this country would be the day of our happiness. Our worries would be reduced and it would increase the longevity of life—at least twofold. For, if we are told that the State would look after the children after our death, no man in his senses would work himself to death in order to save a little bit by not eating well, not dressing well and not living in comfort."

This discussion was rather abstract. The point at issue was to watch the fireworks which was of interest to the children. The family went to see the fireworks.

"The wealth of this country is being burnt away heartlessly," remarked Premchand. "And there is nothing that one can do about it. In fact our ability to derive pleasure out of this spectacle shows our callousness and indifference."

Premchand looked distressed as if his own house had been on fire. For several subsequent months, he would painfully refer to this wasteful extravagance on fireworks and illuminations.

His approach and reaction to such events approximated to those of Gandhiji whom, incidentally, he had never met. Once Gandhiji's visit to Allahabad was to coincide with a meeting of the Hindustani Academy. Premchand was anxious to meet Gandhiji whom he considered to be in the same class of people as Christ who was nailed alive, as Rama and Krishna who waged battles in the cause of justice, as Mohammed who experienced hardships—even in getting drinking water—and as the Buddha, surrounded by enemies.

Told of his desire, Pandit Sunderlal wrote to him that if he came to Allahabad two days in advance of the Academy's meeting he would arrange a meeting with Gandhiji. Premchand, therefore, advanced his date of visit to Allahabad. "The people are surprised to hear that I have never met Gandhiji so far."\*

"Would Gandhiji have left Allahabad if you reach on the Academy's scheduled dates of meeting?" asked his wife.

\*Dr. Dhani Ram Prem quotes Premchand as saying that Gandhiji visited his (Marwari) high school in 1921-22. In the light of Mrs. Premchand's account, this seems incorrect.



"Yes, he may go: As you know, he doesn't stay long at that place, or for that matter at any place."

He went to Allahabad two days before the Academy's meeting and returned two days later than scheduled, yet could not meet Gandhiji!

His wife expressed surprise. "The poor man is frightfully busy," he said. "Hundreds of people want to meet him; and it is indeed difficult for him to find time. Besides, he has hundreds of letters to attend to every day."

"You tell me that this is his daily routine. But so many people meet him daily. Why not you? Or was there anything special to keep him busy?"

"The people who force themselves on him are determined to see him. But I wanted to have five to ten minutes with him. I miss little of what he writes. But I hear that, as in everything else, he is an expert in the art of conversation also. And I wished to fulfil my desire of conversing with him."

"You have waited four days, and even then you could not fulfil this desire."

"It was my misfortune...."

Be that as it may, his life was of Gandhian simplicity. Once the Raja of Kalakankar called on Premchand with some friends to invite him to his house. The author made them sit on the ground, as he himself did. Mrs. Premchand, when she knew of this, felt embarrassed and insisted that he must get a few chairs for guests.

"I don't go about making arrangements for the rajas and maharajas," said Premchand. "I am only a labourer. I live a life that I can afford. My throne, my seat of power, is the earth. If they deign to sit on the earth, what can I do? You ask me to put up some sort of a show?... In this country the average wage is one and a half anna a day; and there are many who do not get even two square meals a day.... It is not necessary that I also should fall in line with those who are living on the toil of others. I am quite happy as I am. I have little worries.... If I get chairs to sit on, then you will want a carpet, and then some servants to look after these things. One thing leads to another. Those who get entangled in these are seldom free from these encumbrances. It is these luxuries that led to our enslavement."

Premchand could, however, be fussy at times, as for instance, in the matter of his daughter's wedding. He insisted that not only should the boy be handsome, intelligent and hardworking, but also that his mother must be alive, and that he must be in the habit of paying due respect to his parents. "A boy who does not get on well with his parents can never get on well with his wife. How can one who does not love his parents love anyone else?"

The boy he selected for his daughter was a B.A. student. He had two sisters, already married, and a younger brother. His mother was alive but his father had died while the boy was nine. The latter had left a little estate, bringing some three thousand rupees annually as revenue.

What pleased Premchand immensely was to know that the boy's father (who, incidentally, had been a great admirer of Premchand's books) had participated actively in the political movement following the partition of Bengal, that he had been imprisoned, that he always wore *swadeshi*, and that this "lat of Deori" was so popular that the people had raised four thousand rupees for his defence.

The match was negotiated by the husband of the boy's sister, who was then managing the estate. He came and stayed with Premchand for several days and accepted the proposition. Back home in Jubbulpore, however, he wrote that the boy, the eldest son of the family, was the "master of the house" and that he and his mother would see the girl and approve. Premchand did not like this attitude of a youngman, not accepting what his elders decide for him. "I want to marry my daughter to the youngman, not to the master of the house," he said. He nearly broke off the negotiations.

The boy's brother-in-law was embarrassed. He explained that the boy was grown up, that he would like him to take on the responsibility for the decision and that, therefore, his own stand should not have been misunderstood. He also sent the youngman's acceptance which read: "I accept the proposal, but this should be understood that the girl's house should not go bankrupt; the relationship with the in-laws is not for one day; it is for three generations."

This letter pleased Premchand immensely. The boy's brother-in-law and his wife came again to stay with Premchand's family

for three to four days. Premchand wanted them to stay longer. He told his wife: "Looks are not the only thing; they should know the girl; they should know her temperament; and they should know everything they wish to know. And, if they skip a few things, you should yourself tell them all that they should know about the girl. And also please tell them that after marriage, when the girl wishes to visit us, they should not normally raise any objection."

Wrote Premchand to his friend Nigam on February 21, 1929: "You will be pleased to hear that my daughter's wedding has been fixed with a youngman of a well-to-do family of district Saugor. His people came here and left only yesterday. I shall go there in a few days to perform the preliminary ceremonies (*varaccha*). The boy is studying in B.A. The family has enough property. The marriage would cost me four thousand. I can manage two thousand only. Could you kindly tell me how much you can give me before the end of March, so that I look round to make arrangements for the rest? I would not have bothered you about this, but those people are keen to have the marriage performed this year itself. I am, therefore, helpless. The marriage will take place in Banaras."

For further help, he wrote to other friends. Among them was one J. P. Bhargava, in partnership with whom he had started the "Sarvajanic Granthamala." A copy of the agreement\* (draft) has been found in the papers left behind by Premchand.

\*A. The series of books will be named "Sarvajanic Granthamala."

B. It will be the joint concern of Pandit J. P. Bhargava and Dhanpat Rai, B.A. General books will be published. School books will also be published.

Terms:

1. Pandit J. P. Bhargava will bear the cost of publishing the books. The editing work will be done by D. Rai. The copyright of the books will be settled with the authors by both the partners.

2. The party No. I will undertake to pay remuneration to the authors, and copyright of such books will rest with him. Five p.c. of the profits will go towards the editing charges.

3. Premchand's works will be published by the parties on royalty system. Five p.c. of net profits will go to each party after the publishing charges have been defrayed by the party No. I.

4. In case of school books. the responsibility of compilation will rest with party No. I. He will have to pay the author from his own account. The money paid by the party No. I will be charged to this.

The marriage took place at Lamhi as scheduled.

It was typical of Premchand's character that he disliked many of the traditional ceremonies. He asked his cousin to do the *dwarpuja*, and refused to do the *kanyadan*, for, he said, "how can one give away a daughter in *dan*. One gives away only inanimate objects in *dan*; of the living things only a cow is given as *dan*; and none other."

Mrs. Premchand, therefore, had to perform the *kanyadan* while Premchand was forced to sit close by.

A description of all this is found in one of his stories captioned *Gila* which is a veiled portrait of himself as seen through his wife's eyes.

In so far as dowry was concerned, Premchand insisted on spending more on utensils. "Money is spent away, but these lasting things remain for generations; and one remembers the donors for a long time."

The young son-in-law, Vasudev Prasad, asked Premchand for advice regarding further studies after graduation. Premchand advised him to take to law (which, incidentally, had been his own ambition in younger days). Whenever Premchand met Vasudev, his shy son-in-law, he was considerate. Without being asked, he would go and order what he thought his son-in-law should have. Once, for instance, he felt that he needed a bicycle to go from Lukerganj to Muir College in Allahabad, went to the market and bought one. He would correct the letters that Vasudev wrote to him and send them back to him.

Once Premchand's son-in-law had come to Lucknow during the Holi vacation from Law College. Like Premchand's two sons, he was also afraid of coloured water. The elder son slipped out of the house. The younger one and Vasudev Prasad hid themselves in the room upstairs. Premchand was suffering from

5. The books of the series will be published at the Saraswati Press and, unless the press is unable to cope with the work, no work will be published at any other press.

6. The standard of work will be high and the rates of printing will be settled by mutual consultation.

7. In case, the parties like to break up, copyright of such books as have been paid for by Party No. I will be his property while Premchand's copyright will belong to Party No. II.

8. In case.....

cold. Full of zest for Holi, he played it with whosoever came up to him.

When Mrs. Premchand cautioned him against too much water being a danger to his cold, he said: "My two sons and son-in-law have run away. Should I also join them? Where are they, anyway?"

"Dhunnu has slipped away, and the other two have hidden themselves in the room upstairs."

He called out for them. He did not bathe till midday, nor did he allow them to do so. When Dhunnu returned, he was cajoled.

"Why are you so afraid of colour?" he asked. "It is colour after all; all the people play Holi on this day. Had you been here, you also would have participated, and I might have been spared a good deal of this coloured water. Owing to your non-participation, however, I have to behave as a youngster and bear the brunt of all the coloured water. You people ought to have some zest for life. I have as much zest for it at my age, as I had when I was a youth. And you have lost all zest even in your youth!"

In fact, Premchand was extremely enthusiastic about the observance of all festivals. Two days before the Holi, he would get colours, *bhang* and sweets. And on the day of the festival he would play Holi with friends, students and colleagues, offer them sweets and *bhang*. He would then sing songs, either by himself or along with his wife. In a sense he had the full participation of his wife in most of what he did.

An almost illiterate woman, Shivrani Devi educated herself through her own efforts. She wrote stories secretly and, in the beginning, tore them. One of her stories, *Sahas*, sent to the editor of *Chand*, was corrected by editor Sehgal and published in his magazine under her name Shivrani Devi, "wife of Premchand." Sehgal, who sent Premchand a copy which carried an instalment of *Pratigya*, congratulated the "king of novelists" that his wife had also started writing. (*Sahas* is the story of a young girl who beats up her would-be husband at the time of the marriage ceremonies. She has already got a teacher's job—because the husband-to-be is an old man. Her courage is praised by everyone in the town.)

"So, you too have become a writer?" said Premchand to his wife, handing her the copy of the magazine. "Your story

is an attack on men, and all my colleagues in the office were furious at this criticism of men."

"It wasn't much of a story; it is just making fun of a weakness of menfolk."

"While you take it as fun, the men are reeling under this attack."

"But only those who misbehave have reason to feel aggrieved. Why should others feel so?"

"But you won't withdraw the attack, would you?"

"How long should we women wait to expose such things?"

The treatment of the theme was obviously handled by a woman. But quite a few people thought that what appeared under Shivrani Devi's name was actually written by Premchand himself, and only published in her name. Premchand had, in fact, to explain to these doubting Thomases that it wasn't so.

"By taking to writing, you have created problems for myself," he said. "You were leading a comfortable life. Why did you think of getting into these troubles? The best course for you is not to write any more."

"If I give up writing, it would prove that those who think that you are the real author were right, and now that it has been exposed, she has given it up.

"But what do you get out of it, except unnecessary headache?"

"If it is a headache, why do you undergo it? You say that literary work is an addiction. I may also have become an addict."

"But, it is all so unnecessary."

"Should I succumb to the threat and give up writing? When these critics are convinced, they will themselves give up the smearing campaign."

She continued to write. The themes of a few short stories by Shivrani Devi would throw some light on her approach.

*Qurbani* highlights the values of tolerance. A widow, who is popular in the area, offers her house for the sacrifice of a cow on Id day to a Muslim neighbour. She is standing guard outside the house when the Hindus come and murder her. The Muslim is too deeply touched by her offer, and changes his mind in deference to her sentiments, little knowing that her co-religionists have murdered her already.

*Samjhauta* gives arguments between Mohan and Lalita regarding women's rights and place in society in free India.

In *Nari Hridaya*, Karmavir Singh, Police Inspector, takes care of the future of his deceased friend Ghalib Singh's only son Vijay. Karmavir Singh intends that the son should marry his only daughter Prabha. The boy's mother agrees. The son stays at the "uncle's" and is attached to his daughter. Later he becomes a tehsildar at Gorakhpur and takes to evil ways. He does not visit the "uncle's" house. Forced by his mother, Vijay comes, but his "beloved" is on the deathbed.

In *Karni ka Phal*, a thakur, who is a loafer, wins the confidence of another who is a widower and has a widowed daughter in the house. He throws amorous glances, forces a "date" and is given a shoe beating by the girl, Subhadra, with the moral support of her friend, Kanti.

In *Boodhi Kaki*,\* a widower remarries, making the position of his daughter and the family maid, Boodhi Kaki, miserable. The stepmother is cruel. She agrees to give only five hundred rupees for the girl's wedding, and no more. The old maid brings out all her savings for the purpose quietly. The widower is touched.

*Vijaya* shows the sacrifice of a "discarded" wife for her husband who takes on a mistress, a prostitute, and is deserted by her. While he is very gravely ill and none does anything for him, his wife appears in the garb of a male seva samiti worker, and attends on him. The secret is known pretty late.

*Sacchi Sati* is the story of a devoted inseparable couple. The husband, after a long interval, gets a job and goes alone to another city to fix up a house so that the family could be fetched. He takes a house, is fixing nails for a chick, when he falls and dies. The wife and mother are taken there. The wife refuses to be parted. She also dies. The two are taken for cremation together.

In *Saut* a cruel stepmother creates differences between the stepson, who ignores his stepmother, and his wife. She gets the property transferred in her name, poisons the stepson and throws the daughter-in-law to the wolves—by selling the house to a *mahajan*.

Most of the stories by Shivrani Devi were published in journals other than *Madhuri* edited by Premchand; and it seems that she did not receive much honorarium for them.

\*This should not be confused with a story of the same name by Premchand.

## Jainendra Kumar

IT WAS AS the editor of *Madhuri* in Lucknow that Premchand came to know a youth named Jainendra Kumar who became one of his closest friends during his last six or seven years.

Jainendra Kumar has himself told us how he came into touch with Premchand through a short story which he sent to the great writer for opinion, not in his capacity as the editor of *Madhuri* but as the author of such celebrated works as *Rangabhoomi*. The story was returned with the editor's regrets. On its last page were written in red ink the words: "Please state if this is a translation."

Jainendra Kumar says he felt sure this was in Premchand's own handwriting. "Premchand after all was not really inaccessible." He sent another story, *Andhon ka Bhed*, again for Premchand's opinion. Came the reply that it had been accepted for publication in the special short story number of *Madhuri* due to be published three months later. Impatient, Jainendra wrote that he would like the story to be published immediately, i.e. in the following issue and that he would send another one for the special short story number. He was told in reply: "You have been informed that it has been selected for the special number and would be published in that issue only."

Soon afterwards, says Jainendra Kumar, he received a letter from Premchand: "Seen your story *Pareeksha* in *Tyagbhoomi* and I liked it. Congratulations."

"I felt grateful and humble for the notice Premchand had taken of me," says Jainendra Kumar. "I took it as his blessing and to me it became a matter of pride."

Jainendra Kumar's next story *Aatithya* was, however, rejected by Premchand, and with the rejection slip came the advice that the story lacked in certain things and needed some additions. When his advice was challenged and elucidation sought, he was candid enough to admit: "Please don't take my words for



the gospel truth. Short story is a product of the heart and not of rules and regulations. Rules are there, but only to help. If they stand in the way of the outpourings of the heart, you should not hesitate to infringe on them. . . . Rules, I agree, will certainly undergo changes and will be violated."

Started a chain of correspondence which broke down the distance between the two. When Jainendra Kumar was at Allahabad for the Kumbha Mela, Premchand wrote to him: "My house, the Red House, is near Aminuddaulah Park. On your return journey through here, please do pay me a visit."

Jainendra Kumar has narrated how he tried in vain to search out Premchand's house. None in the neighbourhood—and he stood twenty yards away from the house—knew the house where the great author lived. The one person out of scores who guided him to the house, however, was a poor and low-caste man. And there stood Premchand covering himself with an old and soiled shawl, thick moustaches, a *dhoti* going down just below the knees, hair falling on a small forehead, the head unusually small and his eyes dreamy—the very picture of a rustic peasant. When he saw Jainendra, he came down to help him lift his baggage.

Premchand's house, says Jainendra Kumar, was in disorder. Nothing appeared to be at the right place. The courtyard had been flooded with water. Very soon, however, Jainendra became oblivious of his surroundings; he was absorbed in captivating and brilliant conversation. Premchand's firm convictions and transparent honesty as a writer, and as a man, made a lasting impression, so did his knowledge of Western and Indian literature.

Talking of Indian literature, Jainendra asked him if he thought that Bengali literature was very moving and if so, why?

"I agree," replied Premchand, "and I think it is due to the strong feminine characterisation." (Some years earlier he had written to Taj: "I wish to see literature masculine and do not like femininity in literature, no matter in what form. It is for this reason that I do not like most of Tagore's poems.")

"Because of femininity?"

"Yes, that makes it sentimental. And sentimentalism is based on emotions and imagination more than on realism. Good characterisation needs both." (Premchand's eyes looked

beyond—into the unknown, “the redness of the eyes disappeared and gave place to the blueness of the farsight.”)

“In fact,” he added, “I am not very certain.... You see, I am not a Bengali. The people of that province are sentimental. And through sentimentalism they attain heights that are beyond me. What one cannot reach through reason, one can through intuition.... Rabindranath and Sarat Chandra are both great writers. But is that the way for Hindi too? I should think not. That, anyway, is not the way for me.”

The discussion continued from six to nine o'clock, when Premchand was reminded that he had to bring medicine from the doctor's and that, lost in talk, he seemed to have forgotten about it.

Premchand got up. “Let me get some medicine, Jainendra,” he said, “I completely forgot about it. (He gave his characteristic laughter which made the cobwebs on the ceiling vibrate.) And you too have not done your ablutions.”

Premchand picked the empty bottle from the niche, put on the slippers and went out in the same dress he had on. Back to the house, a bath, a meal and off to *Madhuri* office in a tonga. On the way there was discussion on a variety of subjects ranging from palmistry to agnosticism.

“What do you think of palmistry?” he asked Jainendra.

“Why, do you believe in it?”

“I can't say for certain that I do. But I have a friend in the office who is good in palmistry. Some of the things he said have come so very true that I cannot say that this science is all a fraud.”

“You may believe in it, but I have never been able to have faith in this.”

“Can we go against the results of research which may have been done for a very very long time?”

“Must you have faith in this when you have no faith in God?”

“He is beyond my reach. I cannot have that degree of faith. How can I have faith in Him when I see a child in suffering or a patient writhing in pain. All round there is hunger, poverty and disease. And for all these, there is enough in this world. Would you blame me then if I don't believe in His Kingdom above? The difficulty that arises is that when you believe in Him, you also have to believe in His kindness. And I don't

see any signs of that kindness. How can I then believe in Him and His ocean of kindness?" After a pause: "Do you believe in Him?"

"There appears to be no other way out."

Premchand said: "You may imagine Him for the sake of consolation, in order to fill a vacuum or to arouse your hopes. Basically, however, it is a projection of one's own self. Man has to bathe in the light of the all-round beautiful which appears in the form of good and happiness. Its path is that of renunciation, penance. . . . Life cannot be equated with writing a treatise on Yoga Vasishtha. Those who don't believe in Him weep when they lose a dear one. So do those who believe in Him. Why should then one believe in Him?"

On arrival in the office, the palmist friend was called in. He saw Jainendra's palm and said certain things which did not appear convincing to Jainendra Kumar.

Returning home in the evening, Premchand asked Jainendra what he had to say about palmistry. The latter said he held to the views expressed earlier. Premchand felt "pained." It was an affront, he thought, to the research done by numerous people; for, although he did not believe in a personalised God, he did believe in the value of knowledge acquired by Man through various sciences. And he would not like any disrespect being shown to knowledge. He was not dogmatic and would accept the experiences of others at their face value. Two contradictory things, an indifference to religion and a faith in palmistry, says Jainendra Kumar, thus found a place in his heart. He had a questioning mind, but also a faith; he would believe in trivialities and banalities, but would like to bring about reform in vital matters.

Discussions on the position of the writer in India continued, joined in the evening by Rudra Narain Aggarwal\* who had translated Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and *Resurrection*, and also *Vanity Fair* into Hindi. Only *Resurrection* had been published. While the resources of smaller publishers to undertake the pub-

\*Four years later, Premchand wrote to Jainendra Kumar: "There would be very few people as hard working as Rudra Narain Aggarwal. . . . He is down with TB in a hospital in Lucknow. . . . There is none to help him, none to sympathise with him. And he is dying. Such is the condition of litterateurs in India."

lication of translations were limited, the bigger ones either evaded consideration or kept them "under consideration." Premchand felt pained at this sad state of affairs.

He had himself been a victim of circumstances. Income from writing being hardly enough to meet his needs, he told Jainendra, he had mobilised his own and his friends' and relations' resources to start a printing press without knowing how to run it on business lines. The press lost heavily. And he got so fed up that he locked it up and made for Lucknow where he got at least two square meals a day. The press, however, had to be run. And to provide enough job work to the press he was contemplating the publication of a monthly journal to be devoted to short stories only.

## HANS : The Third "Son"

A MONTHLY MAGAZINE of his own had, in fact, been one of Premchand's principal ambitions from the early years of the present century. A journal of his own, he now thought, would also provide enough job work to the Saraswati Press. For, among the chief reasons for the losses incurred by the press had been the lack of adequate work—as also its mismanagement under the supervision of Guru Ramkarma Visharad (addressed as "bhaiya" by Premchand possibly because he hailed from his own village).

Premchand in Lucknow was on the look out for a new manager, and asked many of his friends to help him find one. The result of the search was one Pravasilal Malaviya whose services seem to have been secured through the good offices of Shiv Pujan Sahai who used to get the books for the Pustak Bhandar of Lahariaserai (Bihar) printed in the Saraswati Press. The new manager appeared to have been enthusiastic, and among his first activities was the shifting of the press from Madhyameshwar to a house on Mritunjaya Mahadev Road. Premchand was very happy with the plans prepared for the press and the journal and rushed to Shiv Pujan Sahai, in Banaras, to tell him that "the press had become a nightmare; the burden is now off my chest, and after a long time I shall sleep well tonight."

Premchand confided in Nigam: "The proposed journal would deal largely in short stories. I know that the venture is a stupidity, full of headaches with little yield. But I feel like committing a stupidity. There have been so many of them in my life! Let there be another one. I have had few successes till now, and have little hope of any success in future." This was on February 12, 1930.

The proposed journal came out in March. The name given, *Hans*, was suggested by Jaya Shankar Prasad. Through the journal, their differences narrowed down. Editing of the journal was done by Premchand himself from Lucknow. The first

issue carried eight poems or prose-verse pieces, eight short stories, one of them, *Juloos*, by Premchand himself, a leading article explaining the objects of the journal, editorial notes and two regular columns, "Mukta Manjoosha" and "Neer Ksheera," embracing literary news from Indian languages other than Hindi, and reviews, etc.

The editorial in the first issue read: "It is a matter of extreme good fortune that *Hans* has been born at a time when a new epoch is being ushered in, in India, and when the country is moving frantically to free herself from the bonds of slavery. The year will be remembered some time in a memorable way: for, great memorials are being erected to commemorate even small victories: How the memory of this great victory will be celebrated is for the future, but the victory is such that there can be no other instance of this type in world history. Its memorial would, therefore, be an impressive one. To worship this new god, to commemorate this great victory, we stand here with the ceremonial earthen lamp. We are conscious that we are nobodies. And you may also say it is strange that, even before the start of the battle, we should think of victory and of erecting a memorial. But independence is only awareness of the mind. To arouse this awareness is indeed independence. Our awareness had been so dulled into inanimation that it was beyond comprehension that this awareness could even take birth. But India's oarsman (Gandhi) has given us this conception. It would grow and prosper. The ways of liberation that we had thought of earlier proved in vain. Although, even at their inception, there was a stiff opposition from the conservatives, we shall be victorious in this struggle one day. Whether that day will dawn sooner or later depends upon our efforts, the condition of our mind and our heart. It is, of course, our duty to endeavour to usher in that day at the earliest. This then is the aim of *Hans*. And the policy of the journal shall be in pursuance of that aim. It is said that when Shri Rama was building the bridge across the straits (of Mannar), little birds and animals helped him by bringing a little of the earth to build the bridge. The battle in which the country is now engaged is far more grim. India has sounded the bugle for the non-violent battle. Leaving the peace of the pond, *Hans*, with a little lump of earth in its tiny beak, has started to help cross the straits

(i.e. help in the struggle for freedom). Seeing the vastness of the expanse of water, it loses heart. But the organisational strength (of the nation) gives it courage. Whether it will see victory—crossing the expanse of water—or whether its life drama will end before the victory is achieved, is for an astrologer to say. But we are sure that its determination will not weaken. Such then will be its politics. In literature and society, it would introduce qualities which have been left to it by tradition.”

Fight for India's freedom was Premchand's main preoccupation. “The Congress took another step forward this year and resolved on complete independence,” he wrote to Keshoram Sabarwal, a translator of his stories into Japanese. “There is a divergence of opinion in the matter; moderate opinion is not prepared to go to the extreme—independence—but the younger politicians will not hear anything short of that. Dominion status, in my view, is a camouflage and independence is the only fitting reply to the arrogant imperialists of England.”

The British Government, however, was not prepared to concede the Congress demand and the Congress had to launch the salt satyagraha. Premchand supported it wholeheartedly. Hitting at the critics who called the satyagraha movement “premature,” he wrote to Nigam that “the salt satyagraha is premature in the same way as Death is always premature, or as the moneylender's demand for payment is premature. Any movement or situation which involves financial risk or other sacrifices is always considered premature. The popularity of the salt satyagraha is itself a proof that the movement is not premature. It has clearly shown that if two out of every hundred English-educated persons are for the movement, the remaining ninety-eight are against it. All the money spent on universities and schools has thus been a sheer waste from the national point of view. Those who come out of the universities are supporters of the foreign government and not of the nation as such. On the other hand, it is only those who are uneducated in English—the business people and those in other occupations—that have injected life into the movement. If the country were to depend for its liberation on the so-called educated people, it would not be free until doomsday.

“When the fact is known—and no proof or argument is necessary to prove it—that the foreign government does not introduce

reforms until it is convinced of the strength behind the movement, is not the educated people's indifference to the movement painful? The slavish mentality exhibited by the lawyers, doctors, professors, and government servants has been completely unexpected. These classes depend upon the continuance of the foreign government for their existence. They cannot, even for a movement, forget their comforts and selfishness. This then is their only creed—they either do not at all want freedom, or they are not prepared to pay its price, and would take pride in blaming others. . . . Or, maybe, they are lost in the belief that freedom will come somehow. During the first phase of the Congress movement, these classes kept themselves aloof. During the second phase now, they are again indifferent. Of course, they know that what they have got and what they consider their right, is the result of the sacrifices and the endeavours made by others. It is this bourgeois climate that makes the Havenots the enemies of the Haves."

No wonder, then, that he devoted a couple of hours every day to Congress work. He made bulk purchase of *khadi* shirts, *dhotis* and caps, and himself made the young volunteers wear them. His wife garlanded the volunteers. "Go along, brave sons of the country," he exhorted them, "break the Salt Law. I'll join you soon." Seeing the volunteers being beaten up he got ready to go and break the law. Mrs. Premchand dissuaded him and pointedly referred to his bad health. One day, after an argument with his wife, he left the house determined to be beaten to death by the clubs of the police. But his head was not broken and he returned home at eleven o'clock at night!

"On my return from Nainital in June, I got involved in Congress affairs," he told Nigam. "The city is under army occupation; Section 144 is in force. British tommies and Indian army-men have put up tents in the two parks of Aminabad. Police is arresting people and wants to break up the Congress organisation. The new repressive measures have broken the people's determination."

"My aspirations," he wrote to B. D. Chaturvedi, "are few, and foremost among them is that we should be successful in our struggle for independence. I no longer aspire for wealth or fame. I expect very little even from my two sons. In fact, all that I expect of them is that they should be honest, truthful,



resolute. I would hate my children hankering after wealth, and luxuries and become sycophants. I also do not wish to retire from active life. My needs are few, (extremely) simple food and very ordinary clothes. I do not aspire for a motor car or a huge mansion to live in. I do, of course, wish to write a few top class books. But the object in writing them is also the attainment of the goal of independence."

Premchand's articles and editorial comments at this time were on subjects like "The role of literature in the struggle for independence," "Dominion status and swaraj," "The duty of the youth," "Get ready for the struggle for independence," "Machine-gun and peace," "Need for propaganda in villages," "The big stick," "Simon Report," "Boycott of the Round Table Conference."

Stories written about this time included some powerful ones, such as *Poos ki Raat*. A majority of them, however, were graphic portrayal of the different aspects of the nationalist movement—picketing of shops selling foreign cloth and liquor, *prabhat pheries*.

*Juloos* reflects the temper of the times of the satyagraha movement when a police inspector hopes to impress his bosses by dispersing crowds who cheer the nationalist procession. Ibrahim, an old man, is trampled under the hoofs of the police mounts. The mob is restive. The injured man as the chosen leader, however, tells the mob not to indulge in violence. He dies and there is again a procession—but this time a funeral procession. The inspector is again there at the head of the police force. Among the front ranks of the women processionists, he sees his wife and is ashamed of himself. The other women in the procession point towards him as the assassin of the leader, Ibrahim, whose memory was so sacred that it drew thousands and thousands. The police inspector is deeply moved. He makes for the house of Ibrahim's widow. There follows, independently, his wife for service to the hero's wife and to beg her pardon.

*Sharaab ki Dukan* echoes the boycott of liquor shops by nationalist volunteers, men as well as women. A woman volunteer offers to picket the liquor shop, but a youngman persuades her that liquor shops, the haunts of bad characters, are not the place for ladies. He gets himself detailed there. He is beaten in a scuffle which arises from his picketing. Others quarrel with the drunkards. The woman comes to the scene on the

next day, is pushed aside and is injured. The youngman also comes to the scene and is hit again. The chief drunkard now breaks his liquor bottle and pours cold water on the unconscious man. The liquor licence-holder decides to give up his licence to open a shop for selling swadeshi cloth.

*Maiku* is also in the same strain. *Maiku*, who goes to a liquor shop determined to have a drink, slaps a volunteer so hard that his cheek bears the imprint of his five fingers. During an argument with the volunteer who challenges him that he cannot enter the shop unless he tramples upon him, *Maiku* says that he is going into the shop for a purpose other than drinking. The volunteer lets him go reminding him for his promise. *Maiku* is touched by the sacrifice of the volunteers in stopping the people from drinking so that they could feed their children better. He enters the shop and, with the staff given him by the shopkeeper to hit the volunteers, he hits the customers and threatens them that he would follow it up on the following day also.

*Samar Yatra* captures the mood of the people during the satyagraha movement when travelling groups roused the people, young and old, to enrol as volunteers. In this story, the village leader (*Kodai*) is arrested by the police for harbouring satyagrahis who come to his door, and others come forward to take his place. The most moving example is that of the 75-year old *Nohri* who, out of a sense of humiliation because she cannot make an offering, joins the crowd of younger people, and dances with joy. She joins the volunteers, feeling as though she was flying in a chariot towards heaven.

Some of the stories in *Hans* were considered "seditious" by the authorities who planned to take action against such publications. Ordinances were promulgated to control the press. The Congress working committee reacted sharply and called upon the press to refuse to pay the security demanded of the papers under the Ordinance and to close down the papers instead. When 32 pages of the July 1930 issue of *Hans* had been printed, a security of Rs. 1,000 was demanded of the Saraswati Press. Premchand wrote to Nigam: "The Press Act, after all, has victimised me. I have been asked to pay one thousand as security. I am going to Banaras tomorrow (July 31, 1930). I see danger in depositing the security and bringing out *Hans*. I am thinking of closing down the journal and also winding up

the press. A decision in this regard will be taken only after I have visited Banaras and studied the situation there."

Premchand found that only 32 pages of the July issue had been printed. He had it dispatched with a fly leaf giving the following announcement:

"BLACK ACT'S ONSLAUGHT ON HANS. Readers, friends and well-wishers of *Hans* will be sorry to hear that we are suspending the publication of *Hans*—in fact, postponing it for some time. We do so, not because of our own volition, but because we have been forced by the Black Act promulgated by the bureaucracy.

"The reason precisely is that a security of Rs. 1,000 was demanded on 29-8-30 of the Saraswati Press which gave birth to *Hans*. We have preferred closing down the press to paying the security.

"The expectations with which we fondly launched *Hans* were miles away from achievement. Even though we suffered a loss of several thousand rupees, we did not bother about it and kept up our spirits. Had some other press been willing to print *Hans*, we would have got it printed elsewhere and continued the journal. But it has not been possible to make such arrangements. We are, therefore, helpless.

"Nevertheless, we hope that our subscribers would bear with us and, God willing—and we have full confidence—we hope to serve you, in a month and a half to two months' time, with a better and more attractive fare.

"When the press had to be closed down only four formes (32 pages) had been printed. We thought of getting the remaining four formes printed at some other press. Even to this day, however, this wish could not be fulfilled.

"Despite ourselves, therefore, we had to dispatch this issue, containing four formes only. The title page had to be printed at some other press.

"Our readers need not feel disappointed. We shall make up for this thin number in our subsequent issues and, rather than dispatch joint issues, we shall send them twelve issues (for one year) to meet our commitment. This would, of course, take time.

"In the meantime, we are indenting German printing machinery, so as to make *Hans* more attractive. We are also collecting good pictures for the journal. And we hope to present

the sixth issue to our readers soon. "Finally, we have to request our admirers to help us a little in this crisis.\* We want them to enlist two subscribers from among their friends in their spare time. If they are unable to send the subscription fee by money order, they may send us only their names, so that, as soon as the sixth issue is out, we may send it to them by VPP and realise the subscription money. If they would do this for us, we assure them that we shall try our utmost to make *Hans* very attractive—Manager."

Stories published in *Madhuri* and other journals also reflected the same sentiments.

*Patni se Pati* is a portrayal of the period when foreign manufactured articles were made a bonfire of in Indian homes. The life of an Indian Government official who imitates the British, with whom he tries to identify himself, is changed when his wife despite his instructions goes to a public meeting arranged by the Congress Party and bids for the single paisa donated by a blind beggar, his only earning, to augment the party funds. She buys this great symbol of patriotism and sacrifice for two hundred rupees. The news spreads. The British bosses are annoyed. The Indian officer's explanation is asked for. He tells the boss that his wife had done it against his wishes. (The boss's wife went about with her paramour and he could do nothing! But the temper of the boss is bad and he rebukes the Indian official as a scoundrel, a treacherous fellow, etc. The latter is provoked to retaliate. He hits the boss and resigns, but is dismissed. His wife, however, is not sorry. She thinks it is his liberation.

*Jail* is an echo of the repressive measures imposed by the British Government against the movement for the boycott of foreign goods. It is woven round two women fully attached to each other in prison. One of them is a widow who is arrested and sentenced. The second one apologises. After being jeered at by the inmates of the jail, who decry her for "apologising," she is released. The woman who goes back home, however, returns soon; for, when the movement gathers momentum and her husband, her mother-in-law and her only son are all killed in a

\*The leafly-ef, it may be mentioned, was printed at Shri Sitaram Press, Banaras, and on the reverse of the manager's announcement was the list of contents.

firing, she is freed from all worries and again courts arrest. She comes back to prison to the widow who is feeling lonely.

*Inteqam* vividly captures the times when nationalist terrorists were tried for various crimes and sentenced to long terms of imprisonment. The widow of a lawyer for the prosecution, who is murdered at Lahore, sets out to take revenge on the murderers. Through spiritualistic seances she determines the name of the murderer and sets out for Shahjahanpur where he lives. In the train she is nearly assaulted by two British Tommies from whose clutches she is saved by one of the passengers. This passenger is, in fact, none other than her husband's murderer. Keen to take revenge, she is torn asunder by the conflict within herself between gratitude for his defending her honour and the revenge she must have for dragging her to these straits. She tries to murder him but he explains to her the wider nationalist motives which had led him to murder her husband. His arguments disarm her.

*Dhikkar* relates to the times when the Iranian forces were advancing against the Greek. The people of Greece pray at the temple of Delphi and the woman priest of the temple says that the Greek defeats have been due to the treachery of one whose house could be singled out by the music and perfumes pervading it even at a time of crisis. The search ultimately leads the people to the house of the (woman) priest's son who has been working as a spy for the Iranians and sending them information about troop dispositions. The people chase him, and he takes shelter in the temple where public outcry is responsible for his starvation and thirst. He tries to mislead the people into liberating him, promising to betray the Iranian secrets, but his mother does not agree. Yes, he must be put to death. And he is entombed.

*Poos ki Raat*, however, is the story of a poor peasant who has saved three rupees to buy a blanket to stave off the cold, but has to pay it to the village moneylender who demands his proverbial pound of flesh. Having been forced to give up the savings, he is left to shiver in the cold. While he guards the field, he lights a fire to keep him warm and to make his dog comfortable. The fire makes him lousy. While he dozes off to sleep, stray cattle damage his crop. He is ruined. But he is happy

that he would now become a labourer and will not have to sleep in the cold.

So much about his short stories. Now about his journals.

*Hans*, during its five months of existence, imposed additional burdens on Premchand. In addition to his work for *Madhuri*, on his novel *Karmabhoomi* and translations for his *Prem Chalisa*, he had to write two stories, some twenty pages of editorial notes or comments on current literary and political topics every month for *Hans*. He had also to arrange publicity for *Hans* and also devote time to correspondence with the contributors.

It is also important to note that *Madhuri* and *Hans* monopolised his stories, and whatever little payment he was getting for his stories from other journals was also lost to him.

In fact, he was forced to invest a part of what he earned from *Madhuri* and his books not only in the printing press, as heretofore, but also in *Hans*. The advertisement revenue\* of the journal was insignificant, and the list of subscribers\*\* not very large. The journal, in any case, was a losing concern. Writers in India had not been able to take up literature as a wholetime profession. "From the point of view of finances," he confessed to Chaturvedi, "my life has been a failure and will continue to be so. By starting *Hans*, I have mortgaged even the savings from my books. There is little hope of my getting the four to five hundred rupees that I would have otherwise got this year."

\*The first issue carried only two pages of advertisement. The second carried ten pages, but seven of these were of the Saraswati Press, including those of Premchand's works. While advertisement of literary works were given a rebate of 25 per cent, vulgar advertisements were rejected.

\*\*The claims of "popularity" of *Hans*, of the "thousands of subscribers and readers," from "the South, Gujerat, Rajputana, Marwar, Malwa, C. P. and Berar, U. P., Bihar, Bengal, Orissa, Madras, Kannada, and other provinces of India, as also subscribers and supporters from Nepal, Bhutan, Portugal, Japan, Africa and Germany, America, London, etc." and all the subscribers of *Bhramar* and *Hindi Manoranjan* of Kanpur who had switched over to *Hans*, were false. The list of subscribers, he candidly admitted to Jainendra Kumar, had not yet crossed the one thousand mark!

## National Movement

NINETEEN HUNDRED AND thirty was a year of ordinances in India—some nine of them were issued within a short period of six months! These ordinances imposed drastic curbs on the life of the community, in particular, on the functioning of the Press. Suspension of the publication of newspapers, however, gave a fillip to the movement of national liberation. Rumours spread like wild fire. People got agitated and excited. More and more of them came forward to offer *satyagraha*. The proclamation of martial law was a common occurrence.

“You probably know,” Premchand told Nigam, “that the city is a military camp. If I get arrested or am knocked down, and my soul leaves its earthly abode, please look after those whom I leave behind. You should not rest content with mere expression of pity and mercy. I am saying all this because these days anything is possible.” Surprisingly, however, the person who got arrested was not Premchand but his wife.

Moved to tears by a fiery speech delivered by Mrs. Motilal Nehru at Lucknow, Mrs. Premchand joined a band of eleven women who formed a Mahila Ashram to serve the cause of national liberation through mobilising womenfolk. The Ashram soon grew into a very large body with some seven hundred members and an elected working committee.

Mrs. Premchand was among those elected to the working committee. Premchand asked Mohanlal Saxena to get Mrs. Premchand's name removed from the working committee, but was told that none could remove the name of one who had been elected by the general body of the Ashram.

On November 10, 1930, Mrs. Premchand was arrested along with six others, on a charge of picketing the shops selling foreign cloth. According to Mrs. Premchand, she had to court arrest because she was restless to ensure that at least one person from her family sought imprisonment. “The children were too young

and my husband's health could not stand the strain." It was, therefore, for her to court imprisonment.

A fortnight later she was tried and sentenced to one and a half months' imprisonment. Premchand came to know of her arrest only on his return from a visit to Banaras, and felt sorry that she should have "blocked his way to go to prison." He visited his wife in jail, sent her books, and seems to have been worried whether she would come out of the jail alive. He took out her photograph, hung it in the living room with a garland around it, and lost fourteen pounds of weight (while she lost only seven!).

She came out in January 1931. "My wife is back from the prison," wrote Premchand to Jainendra Kumar. "But she is not fully satisfied yet and may go in again. She wants independence all at once—not in instalments."

An account of her arrest has been recorded by Mrs. Premchand in the autobiographical issue of *Hans* (February 1932). Her close association with the national movement and her incarceration, incidentally, provided her with some themes for short stories.

In *Griftari*, a father courts arrest, unmindful of the seriousness of his son's illness. The wife continues the husband's work and becomes so popular that, when the police comes to arrest her, there is such a protest from the public that the police is nervous. Like a true satyagrahi, she calms down the mob and appeals to them not to stand in the way of the discharge of her responsibilities to the motherland. The people obey her and disperse peacefully. It is then that she goes to the prison with the police.

Another story, *Jail Men*, is possibly inspired by some character with whom Mrs. Premchand came in contact, or of whom she learnt in the prison. With the political prisoners in the female ward is one who has been condemned on a charge of murder. While she wishes to render service to those convicted for national liberation work, they all shun her. One of them, however, feels that this convict is too delicate to murder anyone and asks her about the true facts. The husband of this convict, it is revealed, had taken on another woman. Hearing that she was still carrying on with another man he murders her. About to hang himself, he is prevented from committing suicide by his first wife who takes on the blame for the murder of his mistress. She is true to her husband and is prepared to make any sacrifice for him.



*Mata* is woven round the life of a police inspector who is opposed to satyagraha and tramples the mob under the hoof of his cavalry. He does all this because he expects to be rewarded by the authorities in the shape of a job for his son who is still studying in college. To his horror, among those killed during the action ordered by the inspector is his own son whose corpse is brought to him on a stretcher. The boy's mother too commits suicide by burning herself.

In yet another story entitled *Hatiara*, Mrs. Premchand portrays the diverse sentiments between different members of the family regarding the desirability of non-violence. A widow's only son joins the terrorist movement and kills a British sergeant. In the resultant conspiracy case, there are several arrests. The widow, who believes in non-violence and *dharma*, feels the injustice being done to a dozen others, goes to the court and tells the magistrate the truth in the presence of those mothers whose sons had been falsely implicated. Just then appears her son, Vinod, who embraces her. She is deeply touched by the whole sequence of events and falls dead in the arms of her son!

The same story, surprisingly, is published in Urdu as *Qatil ki Maan* under Premchand's own name! But for the deletion of the first section of the story, as given by Mrs. Premchand, and the note on which the story ends, namely, the death of the mother of the assassin, not out of shock but by Vinod thrusting a dagger into her, all other details of the two stories are the same—almost *ad verbum*.

The same story by Mrs. Premchand, in fact, has also been re-written by Premchand with some minor changes as *Qatil*, wherein the only son of a widow, whose husband had laid his life in the cause of the country's freedom, joins the terrorist movement. The mother dissuades him from carrying out the nefarious assignment of murdering a British civilian. Seeing him determined to go ahead with his fell project, she also joins the terrorist movement. The assignment to murder the British civilian is now joint. The mother, however, dissuades the son from firing at the civilian who, along with his wife, is going out of his house in a car, lest the civilian's wife is injured. When the civilian is returning home all by himself, she again dissuades the son. But he pulls the trigger. The person who is killed, however, is not the civilian, but the assassin's mother!

*Ahuti*, by Premchand, reflects the temper of the times when students left colleges and schools to join the non-cooperation movement. From among a group of two class-fellows and a girl student, to whom both are attracted, the poorer one, Vishwambhar, joins the movement. The richer one, Anand, points to the dangers and hopes to take advantage of the situation to win over the girl, Malati. He asks Malati to dissuade Vishwambhar, but the latter looks down with contempt on a degree which could at the most get him five hundred rupees a month, as against the freedom of the nation. He goes out to the villages and is sentenced to two years' imprisonment. Malati is happy to see his name in print and has little respect for Anand. She wishes to follow and take Vishwambhar's place.

*Anubhav* portrays how British repression of political movements proved infectious. When a person is sentenced to one year's imprisonment for offering a drink to nationalist volunteers, his friend and his wife come to give shelter to his wife at considerable risk and embarrassment which indeed make her father and father-in-law turn their faces away.

*Chakma* again reflects the temper of the times when shops selling foreign cloth were boycotted and the duplicity of the merchants exposed. One merchant who has the largest stock seeks the help of the police. He finds that the presence of police drives some people away, and also that whereas other shopkeepers, who had given a pledge not to sell foreign cloth, were surreptitiously clearing their stocks, he could not do so. He, therefore, devises a stratagem. When the volunteers are pushed from his shop, under his own instructions, he takes their side and criticises the police for their "high-handedness." A crowd collects and he tells them that he is with the masses and not the police. The office-bearers of the Congress are happy. The police have registered a case and want him to give evidence that the volunteers were interfering in the discharge of duties. He refuses to give "false" evidence. The police pickets are withdrawn. The Congress office does not send the volunteers, for they feel that there is a genuine transformation in the shopkeeper. With the police and volunteers out of the scene, he hopes to clear his stocks within a week or so.

*Holi ka Upahar* also relates to picketing of shops selling foreign cloth. Amarkant is going to his would-be father-in-law's house

in the city. On a friend's advice, he goes to buy a sari for his wife whom he does not recognise. As the sari that he purchases is foreign, he is mobbed by volunteers who picket the shop. They take away the sari. He stands baffled. Comes a girl who is one of the volunteers. She gets it back but keeps it herself, promising to persuade his wife to give up using foreign cloth. As she takes down his address, it is revealed that he is none other than her husband-to-be, whom, of course, she has never seen. Upon this revelation, the young man not only makes a bonfire of the sari there and then but joins the volunteers in picketing the shop selling foreign cloth, and is arrested. His would-be wife comes forward and garlands him as he is being whisked away.

*Do Qabren*, which is on the lines of *Aga Peechha*, shows how the scorn of society leads to the unhappiness of a professor who has married a thakur's daughter by a prostitute. Public scorn affects him deeply. While Muslim friends come, the Hindu friends, especially their wives, keep away. Doubts arise in his mind when he sees that a prostitute-friend of his wife's mother comes to congratulate the parents on the birth of a daughter. He now believes that there is something in everyone's blood. There is argument between the husband and the wife and then a suicide by the wife. The story ends as it begins, with worship at two graves, side by side, of mother and daughter.

*Akhiri Tohfa* echoes the times of the boycott of foreign goods. A swadeshi-wearing man wishes to please his mistress who wants a foreign-made silk sari. He surreptitiously enters the only shop of foreign cloth and purchases a sari. He is pursued by women volunteers, one of whom takes away the sari, undertaking to persuade his "wife" to give up foreign clothes. Next day there is an argument between the "wife" and the volunteer. The mistress browbeats the volunteer and keeps the sari. The lover is pained at the way things take shape. He wants her to give up the sari and, when she refuses, tells her that this is the "last gift" from him.

*Taavaan* also portrays the conduct of the movement for the boycott of foreign cloth. A merchant breaks the Congress seal and sells cloth for ten rupees, in order to get treatment for his wife who is lying ill. The Congress Committee fines him one hundred and one rupees. The merchant is poor and requests

for exemption but the Congress chief says that an exemption to him would necessitate similar exemptions to others also. The merchant's wife is agitated and offers to stage satyagraha and die before the Congress office. It dawns on her that there are others also who have suffered for the country's freedom and are worse off. She tells the husband to mortgage the house and to feed the children and take a pledge not to sell foreign cloth.

*Mritak Bhoj* shows how a corrupt *panchayat*, dominated by the rich of the village, can become an engine of oppression. Seth Ram Nath's widow is harassed by the *panchayat* to sell her property to pay off the debts. She has also to spend all that she is left with in arranging a funeral feast in the memory of her husband, the credit for which is taken by the *panchayat* and her husband's friends who shed crocodile tears. One of them, Jhabbarmal, turns her out of the rented house and it is a green grocer who gives her shelter. Meanwhile, her son is seriously ill and she has little money. She entreats the *panchayat* members, but they have to think not of the treatment of her son, but of the *katha* that would cost several thousand rupees! She sacrifices her life to save her son's. Her daughter, who is becoming adolescent, arouses Seth Jhabbarmal's lust. To please him, the *panchayat* gets interested in the girl's marriage to him, even though twice her age. The helpless creature prefers suicide by drowning to marriage to the doddering old man.

*Prem ka Udaya* portrays the life and difficulties of an honest member of a criminal tribe of gypsies. His wife is jealous of the women of the group who dress well, and wants her husband to do what others do, i.e. steal and commit burglaries. In her talk he notices a threat to the happiness of their married life. He, therefore, takes to the same ways of making easy money by stealing, and is arrested by the police. It is the wife who feels sorry for leading him on to the wrong path, takes pity on him and lets the secret out. Her attachment to him, however, is deepened.

*Sadgati* is the story of the death of a *chamar*. It exposes the hypocrisy of the "defenders of religion." Dukhia, a *chamar*, goes to a Brahmin to ask him to determine an auspicious date for his son's betrothal. The Brahmin, before undertaking the task of calculation, puts Dukhia on such an exacting and hard job of cutting a tree trunk that Dukhia, who had nothing to eat

since the morning, collapses and dies. The Brahmin still shows no mercy and is afraid only of the police. The story ends on the difficulties of how to dispose of the corpse. The Brahmin himself ties a knot—without touching the body—and drags it during darkness to the fields outside where jackals and vultures eat it up!

*Thakur ka Kuan* portrays the iniquitous system in which the Harijans were not allowed to draw water from the wells meant for the caste Hindus. The water in the well for the Harijans has been fouled by a carcass. A sick Harijan's wife, running the risk of being beaten up, goes to the thakur's well to draw water. She hears the talk of other women, who come to the well to draw water, and does not quite understand why her lot should be different from theirs. When they leave, she puts the pitcher into the well. No sooner, however, does she do so than she hears the thakur calling "who goes there?" She rushes back in panic only to find her husband drinking the foul-smelling water.

*Tagada* compares the attitude of a usurious moneylender towards a client who had borrowed five rupees, towards a poor tonga-driver whom he wishes to underpay, and towards a pretty woman to whom he is attracted and yet repelled because she does not belong to his community and any contact with her would pollute his religion.

*Laanchhan*, which is on the lines of *Vinod*, caricatures the viciousness of woman's gossiping and evil tongue. One of this class, who is a terror to all other women members of a ladies club, is humbled when a new member dupes her by smuggling into her apartment a woman in man's clothes, thus giving her a chance to spread malicious talk, and then facing all women with the "man." The evil-tongued one is so ashamed of herself that she quietly disappears.

*Shikar* is the story of a hunter obsessed with hunting to the point of absolute indifference to his wife. When, however, the wife starts taking interest in the husband's principal pursuit, surprises him and goes and sits on the *machan*, her life of gloom and frustration is transformed into one of bliss.

An expert *shikari* pointed out some incongruities in the story. What Premchand wrote back to Sri Ram, the friend who had forwarded the criticism, is of interest from the point of view of

**Premchand's technique of short story.** The letter is in English.

"I was very much amused to see your shikari friend's criticism of my *Shikar*," he wrote. "The gentleman appears to be a shikari pure and simple, without any literary taste. The story has nothing to do with shikar. The object is to show (that) affinity of interest often leads to the attainment of love. Most of our family dissensions originate from want of imagination to sympathise and partake of the joys and sorrows of each other.

"But the gentleman does not tell in what respect the shikar, as described therein, is defective. I admit that tigers are not so clever as to drag a man sleeping on a machan. . . . You, or I, may not have come across such a clever beast, but you cannot say that ingenuity is denied to them. You will agree with me that facts are often stranger than fiction.

"It is true I have not had occasion to observe a shikar. It is equally true that I have not conducted any case in a court, or attended a college, or joined in a feud, or purchased a village, or committed a theft or a murder. If a writer were to confine his writings to what he has actually experienced, he can describe a murder best if he has that power. . . . Shikaris can be counted by hundreds. I have seen lads of fifteen shoot a tiger. Was my tiger shot as one could shoot a fox? Is not my description terrifying enough? . . . Was there presence of mind? . . . Has he shot any tiger? From the manner he writes it is apparent that he has. How was he able to accomplish that super-human feat? And if he was fortunate enough, why should he deny that fortune to my raja. Is it because the gentleman knows that I am not a shikari and that he can take me to task with impunity? I have not undergone that ordeal, but I have read some shikar literature, can visualise the danger, the thrill and fury of the scene. Why does he call it absurd? Certainly very few lives are lost in stag hunt. A tusker has been seen killed by spears.

"Your friend is quite right when he suggests that motor cars are not used on the dizzy heights of Mussoorie. Mussoorie has got good roads; and, when rickshaws can be used, why not motor cars? There may be municipal orders against cars, to avoid accidents. . . . Well, I am not prepared to leash enthusiasm to that extent. Did anybody dream that any motor car, except the viceregal one, would be allowed at Simla? Mahatma Gandhi broke that tradition. My hero and heroine broke that tradition

at Mussoorie a few years earlier. It is childish to pick out incongruities of dress in a gentleman. His hat may not be what it ought to be; his collar or tie may not follow the usage or tradition blindly. One has to see if he looks like a gentleman. If he fulfils that condition, everything else is secondary. . . . I do not quite remember where I have made ducks perch upon trees."

Some of the stories given in this and the previous chapters were published in *Samar Yatra*, which was banned by the authorities, and in *Prerana*, published by the Saraswati Press.

## Withdrawal from Madhuri

THE SUDDEN DEATH of Bishan Narain Bhargava, the proprietor of the Navalkishore Press, on January 10, 1931, in Madras—"where he had gone to take part in horse races, but lost in the race of life"—introduced an element of uncertainty in all the different branches of the Navalkishore Press and strengthened the position of a group which was hostile to Premchand. Doubts were entertained about the continuance of *Madhuri*.

Premchand, who devoted most of his time to the journal, and was only partly associated with the (book) publications of the business house, was told to leave the journal and join the Sahitya Mala section of the Navalkishore Press on a whole-time basis. He does not appear to have had a voice in the matter. The February 1931 issue of *Madhuri* referred to this decision. "Owing to the pressure of work in the (book) publications branch, and also his added responsibilities, Premchand has desired that his name should not be mentioned as one of the editors." Possibly to divert the attention of the journal's readers from the reason that lay behind the decision, the journal promised its readers to publish an illustrated life sketch of the great writer.

"My connection with *Madhuri* has come to an end," wrote Premchand to Jainendra Kumar, "and I am now with the publications branch. In fact, I was already here, but now I am here on a whole-time basis. I propose to leave in April and go back to Banaras. I'll settle down in my village and devote myself to writing and reading, and entrust *Hans* to you; for, even though its circulation has not yet crossed the thousandth mark, your involvement may raise it to two thousand in six months or so."

*Hans*, incidentally, posed several problems. One of these was that of ordinances and the uncertainties about the continuance of the work of the press. Mid-February saw trouble



in Banaras. All business had come to a halt. So had the Saraswati Press.

The printing press even otherwise continued to be a running sore. While its losses were mounting, his stepbrother, Mahtabrai, wanted his investment back and expressed his disgust to others in the family and Premchand's circle of friends. "A letter dated June 1, 1931, from Premchand to Mahtabrai, reveals the difficulties and harassment that Premchand was put to. This is what he says:

"During my talk with Baldevlal, I learnt that you are still preserving, like a precious document, the memory of the hot exchange that we had six or seven years ago. It looks ridiculous and surprising that you should be expecting interest at the rate of one rupee per cent (per month). When Ramkishore mentioned it to me, I didn't believe you could have said it. Hearing it now from Baldevlal, I feel certain that you must have mentioned it to Ramkishore also. I, therefore, think it necessary to clarify the position.

"At the time when the argument took place, neither you nor I had money. If my memory does not fail me, you bid Rs. 9,400. Would you claim that, if I had agreed on this amount, you could have paid off myself and Raghupati Sahai (Firaq)? You could never have paid this amount. Nor, for that matter, could I have paid you Rs. 1,900. The agreement could not, therefore, have been finalised. The press would have continued under your supervision, as it had been running till then.

"My plan in taking over the supervision of the press was that it should yield some profit. And I was confident that I shall make it yield it. I have to think not only of my own interests in the press, but also of that of Raghupati Sahai. Your continuing with the management of the press, I felt, was against your own interest, as well as against the interests of other partners. Once your association with the press was severed, I thought, you would find something better. Indeed, it was with this end in view that I snatched the management of the press from you. The market price of the press—and you know it as well as I do—was nowhere near its book value.

"Even if we agree that you would have paid off the others and that you had Rs. 6,000 (which is extremely unlikely), the balance-sheet of the press did not tally. Most of the outstanding amounts were such as could not be realised, and were, in fact,

not actually realised. There were certain amounts which, even though not mentioned in it, had to be paid immediately. For instance, according to the balance-sheet, I think, amounts totalling Rs. 2,200 were outstanding. Of this, hardly Rs. 500 were realised. If all these had been realised, I would have paid you Rs. 1,900 and got freed of this burden. There were also certain big amounts that had to be paid off immediately. The basis on which I was wanting to pay you off was thus wrong. If I adjust the bad debts and the amounts relating to items handled by you, which I was called upon to pay, your share in the press would disappear completely. The accounts left behind by you show that while the outstandings were Rs. 1,320, the amounts to be paid stood at Rs. 1,635. Of the outstandings, hardly about Rs. 400 were realised, while the amounts paid exceeded Rs. 1,635. In view of the above-stated facts, I am intrigued under what moral law you can claim interest on the principal.

"I realise that you are sorry to have got into the mess of the press and to have invested your money in it. I am also sorry. So is Baldevlal, and so is Raghupati Sahai. All of them are cursing their fate. You at least got a salary from the press for about two years. At the worst you lost only the interest on your investment, which at eight annas per cent comes to Rs. 700 for six years.

"Just imagine my loss. I worked for the press for two years without getting a single pie. I also invested Rs. 500 in addition to what is shown in the accounts. Besides, I have given the press work worth several thousand rupees. I got my books also printed at the press. Even to this day, I have been keeping the press going only by the earnings from my books. If I calculate my total losses—with Rs. 1,500 as salary which I did not draw, Rs. 500 that I invested over and above and which I have not yet got back, and at least Rs. 3,000 from the books which I invested in the press—the total would be somewhere near Rs. 5,000. If I add Rs. 1,900 as interest, my losses could go up to Rs. 7,000. And from the accounts book in the press I can prove that every word of what I say is true.

"As against this, all that you have lost is just the interest on your investment. So has Raghupati Sahai. But he has been bearing all this patiently. Baldevlal, who knows the condition of the press, is also keeping quiet. All of them agree that it

was a mistake to have started the press, and that they would get back what they invested only if they are lucky; otherwise, it could be a dead loss to them.

“Realising my responsibilities, and undergoing all sorts of losses, I have still been trying to make it a success. I run down to this place as often as I can and check the accounts. All that I wish is that it should yield some profit so that the partners could be paid back something. If I had embezzled money, the partners could have been rightly aggrieved. But I haven’t had even a betel leaf from the press. My conscience is absolutely clear.

“So long as I live I shall do everything possible, even undergoing losses, for the sake of the press. If I am destined to put matters right, it will be a success.

“Now how do we finally settle it? Either you, like the other partners, trust me and be patient. If you find that I have drawn some money from the press, you catch hold of my neck and demand your share. If, however, you find that I am undergoing losses, then you should have patience. Alternatively, you return to the press, take over some of the work and accept whatever the press can pay you for a subsistence. If you like, you go round on tours to secure work for the press, sell the books, get a reasonable salary and help me to make the press a success.

“As a last resort, you set up a panchayat to assess the final price of the press, and take your share accordingly, or pay me mine. Among the panchas may be Shri Sampurnanand, Shri Sri Prakasa and Shri Nandkishore.

“Or you take the treadle machine and the cutting machine at their book value and the balance from me. You’ll thus have the consolation that you have got back what you invested. If, however, you want these at the current valuation, the value of assets of the press would go down tremendously. As you know, the assets are only three. Of the two, you have a good idea. The third, namely, the printing machine, won’t have a life of more than one or two years. The old type faces are few. If you were to sell the treadle, the cutting machine and the old type faces, you would hardly get Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 2,500. and all that the press could fetch would be Rs. 4,000 to Rs. 4,500. To realise the cost price is thus out of question. However, you are free to satisfy yourself.

"I am willing to accept any settlement. For, I don't feel happy, nor can I ever feel happy, if I see harm being done to you, or pain being inflicted on you. How happy shall I feel to see you prosper is something which you cannot even imagine. If I were in a position to render you greater assistance, I would not hesitate to do so. •

"But this press has made me a pauper. Whatever I used to earn from my books now goes to feed the press. I am now thinking of returning from Lucknow to Banaras and devoting all my energies to the press to make it a success. If you wish you can help me. If, however, you disagree, you get the value of the press assessed and settle it in whatever way you wish. Or you take from the press whatever you think is your due. I have got the bills for all the items in the press. You may take over goods worth Rs. 2,000 according to the book value. These items may be old, but I have not derived any profit from them. Nor, for that matter, have you. You must understand there are always profits and losses in business. This one meant a loss. I know that if you had Rs. 2,000 you could have easily started a small press. If I had my Rs. 4,500 I also could have started a bigger press. Had we kept the money in a bank, you could have easily received over a thousand rupees as interest, and I, nearly two thousand and five hundred. And I would have escaped the additional loss of several thousands that I have suffered.

"But what is the use of ruminating over these losses? Whatever be the loss, Raghupati Sahai and Baldevlal have kept their faith (in me). So long as I live, I shall try to ensure that they do not suffer a loss. Success or failure is in the hands of God."

As a postscript: "The market value of the press, as you know, is not even half its book value. Your two thousand would thus be hardly one thousand. I wish you to accept any of the conditions given above, or suggest some way to settle this issue—but quickly. I shall be awaiting your reply. I am prepared to accept half the value of my investment, if someone were to offer it to me.

"My share and Raghupati Sahai's total up to Rs. 6,500. I am prepared to sell the two interests for Rs. 3,500 provided, of course, the payment is cash down. The new treadle machine, which was delivered recently, is yet to be paid for. Whether Baldevlal would agree to accept half, I am unable to say."

While Premchand's difficulties in regard to *Hans* and the Saraswati Press remained formidable, his own position in the Navalkishore Press was also becoming ever difficult. The management of the entire business had been entrusted to a Court of Wards under the aegis of the (British) Collector of Lucknow. The dominant group in the press proposed a cut in the salaries of the staff, as also retrenchment. The staff protested at the proposed cut in the salaries. Premchand sided with those who opposed the cut. If the business was running at a loss, he said, all members of the staff would voluntarily agree to a cut. Should, however, the move be a mere excuse, all should join to fight the management. The group which was hostile to Premchand steadily consolidated its position and persuaded the Collector to bring about a reduction in expenditure by retrenchment of those whose work did not bring adequate returns. Premchand was one of those against whom a vendetta was launched.

Here was the greatest Hindi and Urdu writer of his age fighting "small minds." Nothing could be more poignant than his letter to Nigam written on September 11, 1931, which reads: "There is a new development here. Manager X, who is the leader of the group hostile to me, has got a new supporter in one Y, who has been taken on as a canvasser. Ever since his appointment, Y has been trying to dominate the affairs of the business house. Taking me for his enemy from the very first day, he has been trying to get me thrown out. A move for economy was already afoot. He has now thought of getting the entire editorial staff dismissed, and securing books written in the name of responsible and influential persons, preferably members of the (textbook selection) committee. These stupid people here do not realise that what they pay me can be easily realised from a single book that I write. In fact, they haven't yet paid me even half of what they have earned from books written by me, and also that the royalties which they have to offer to the influential ones are very high.

"If Y had not deliberately, with the idea of getting me discredited, delayed pushing through the books, they would have earned hundreds of thousands of rupees. In order, however, to harm my interests, he did not make any effort whatsoever to get the books, that I wrote, accepted. And when these had been turned down by the committee, he carried on a long, protracted

correspondence, solely with the idea of impressing the bosses that he had done his best.

"Last June, I had decided to resign, and had actually written out the resignation. On the advice of a few friends, however, I did not submit it.

"I won't be sorry if I have to leave this place. Only I shall have to work harder. Owing to human frailties, however I feel a little jealous of my enemies prospering at my cost.

"Even though the Special Manager, Z, may not be acquainted with you. Mr. Munro, who is in charge of the Court of Wards, is certainly known to you. Kindly come here to Lucknow for a few days, meet him and acquaint him with the group rivalries. The case of Urdu and Hindi readers is still undecided and Y is still in search of the selection committee members who could write books. He does not like my writing the books because these then will have to be submitted to the committee and he would have to make efforts. If members of the committee themselves lend their names to the books, he would not have to make any effort to get them accepted; those would be accepted automatically. And all that he would have to do would be correspondence regarding the terms, etc. And that precisely is what he wants to undertake.

"May be, he has already told Munro that it is not necessary to have the editorial staff. If you come here and post him with all the facts, Munro would be convinced that the Court of Wards loses little if I continue to stay on here. My only keenness is that he should be posted with all this information.

"An independent man has to face many troubles and difficulties. I have already paid heavily for my independent outlook. But it is too late now for me to mend my ways."

Nigam obliged. The authority's attitude softened; but on October 9, 1931, Premchand had left the Navalkishore Press. His "enemies" had won.

Premchand was a lonely person. He had few intimate friends in Lucknow. In Jainendra Kumar, the author of *Parakh*, he had found a kindred soul. He had, therefore, felt sorry when the latter was incarcerated in Gujerat, Multan and Lahore jails. In his letters to Jainendra, Premchand expressed himself uninhibitedly in regard to the Hindi books then coming out, and opened his heart out as he had done to none other than Nigam. He

looked forward to his next meeting. "It seems an epoch has passed since we met somewhat too briefly."

Once he had visited Lahore but had not broken journey at Delhi only because Jainendra Kumar had not yet come out of jail. "You are so far away that I become restless and feel helpless," he wrote to Jainendra Kumar. "I feel so lonely that I wish to meet you, to hug you and then to take leave of this world. When will you come out?"

Now that he was free from the Navalkishore Press, he visited Jainendra Kumar in Delhi. This was towards the end of October.

One fine morning, according to Jainendra Kumar, Sunderlal, then staying with him, looked up while brushing his teeth and asked Jainendra to see whether it was not Premchand who was coming to his house—a blanket on his shoulder.

Of course, it was Premchand.

"What, no prior intimation, no telegram?" said Jainendra taken aback at Premchand's sudden appearance. "Thank God, it is Delhi, not Bombay. But then do you really know Delhi?"

"Why spend twelve annas on a telegram for nothing?" said Premchand. "You see mine is hard-earned money. Also, why should it have been necessary to inform you? Here I am—at your doorstep. Haven't I found your house on this my first visit to the capital?"

"You don't say this is your first visit to Delhi?"

"But it is so," said Premchand, giving his characteristic laughter.

The programme in Delhi was fairly busy. Premchand stayed there for about ten days and attended several meetings in the nature of get-togethers of Hindi and Urdu writers. In fact, all his time was taken up by meetings. He reached one of them, at Shahdara, four hours late. An anxious audience waited there. He could do no other work, and he admitted that it was the first time in his life that he had done no writing for the day.

A few days later he was invited by the Patna Hindi Sahitya Parishad. The then secretary of the Parishad has told us that he, along with a few others, went to the Patna railway station to receive the honoured guest. None knew what Premchand looked like. The only picture of his that they had seen was in the *Hindi Bhasha aur Sahitya*, then published recently, showing him with a large round face, a wide forehead, thick and long moustaches, flannel trousers and a muffler covered by a

jacket. They looked into the first, second and inter-class compartments. There was none that resembled the person whose picture had been in the book or corresponded to their own image of him. They questioned two or three persons who, they thought, might be Premchand, but were disappointed. They, therefore, left the station somewhat apprehensive whether the great author whose visit had been publicised in advance—to draw crowds—would at all come.

They again went to the station the following morning and scanned all the passengers that got down, but there was none who looked like Premchand. They were again disappointed. In the direction of the third class passengers' waiting room, they saw someone who looked tired and lost. A coolie carrying a little bedding under his arm and a little trunk on his head followed him. The coolie, they heard, was asking him, "where to, sir?" Their attention was attracted. They asked him casually if he was coming from Lucknow.

"Yes, I am coming from Lucknow."

"Are you Premchand?"

"Yes, I am Premchand."

The Secretary of the Parishad, Kishorikishore Sharan,\* realised that he had seen him the previous night and was now sorry.

"I did not see you, and was somewhat annoyed," said Premchand. "As there was none to meet me, I thought of catching the return train at 2-30 A.M. I even went to the train, but then changed my mind because, I said to myself, it would disappoint you...."

"We did not recognise you."

"That's precisely the point. If you did not recognise me, and I had not known you, you should have called out my name. This would have been no affront to my person."

They proceeded towards the city of Patna.

"Would you like to stay at the house of the President of the Parishad, Dr. Harichand Shastri?" asked the Secretary, "or would you accept my hospitality?"

"I have come here at your invitation and would stay nowhere other than at your house."

\*Kishorikishore Sharan, incidentally, had written a series of articles on the "Art of the Novel and Premchand's Novels" in *Chand* from May to October 1931.



Before the evening's principal engagement, Premchand got an opportunity to visit the Patna Museum and saw the sculptures, engravings, utensils and coins of the Gupta and the Maurya periods. He evinced some curiosity in these objects, but not much of a live interest. "Of what use it is to us to see what has been unearthed after thousands of years?"

In the Health Section, however, he saw the clay models of Bihar villages and clay figures of Kaul-Bhils, and was tremendously interested. "What we have to do is to improve the lot of these (aboriginals). We have to think of the present, not of the past."

Talking to the visiting students, he said that "contentment is the greatest wealth in life."

"But contentment would be fatal to the basic motivation for life," said the Secretary of the Parishad. "It is aspirations, and discontentment in life, that lead to a revolution. Contentment would rob life of zest; and there is little difference between life without zest and death."

"From the point of view of collective life," Premchand rejoined, "discontentment is good. For the individual, however, discontentment is bad. Look at the leaders of mass movements. They know that the movement may not bear results in their life time. But to give their all for the liberation of the country brings them contentment. And this contentment is their greatest strength."

The function to honour Premchand, incidentally, seems to have been a grand success and he returned to Lucknow pleased—back again to face difficulties.

Premchand's books brought little money. "I have given up hoping for prizes," Premchand had written to Jainendra Kumar. "If I get one, I'll take it in the same way as I would a treasure found on the roadside. However, if you, or Jaya Shankar Prasad, get it, I'll be really happy. As your needs are many I will be happier if you get it."

When Jainendra Kumar was given a prize of Rs. 500, Premchand congratulated him in the columns of *Hans*, and regretted that he could not ask for a "celebration" on the occasion because of his (Jainendra's) son's death.

Two days before he got the intimation of the tragedy, he had written a short story for *Bharat*. "It turned out to be an

unlucky story; its theme was something on these lines." Added Premchand: "The child is gone; the news stunned me. But then I consoled myself. These are the bitter experiences of life. If you undergo these cheerfully, everything becomes simple. And before whom can we weep? Who's there to look after us? And why should we take anyone to be one's own? Consider them to be your own only in so far as one has duty towards them. I don't claim to be enlightened. This, however, I know that such events do inflict deep wounds, even though it should not be so. That you did not weep has given me consolation. Had you been here, I would have patted you on the back. Such are the occasions in life which pose a test for a man. Please console Bhagwati (Jainendra's wife) and Mataji (his mother). The child was a part of their being. As soon as a child comes into the world, they get involved in attending on him. They must be feeling the void. Your mother has seen the joys and sorrows of life. I can't say anything to her. But I would certainly ask Bhagwati to take heart. You brought up the child, and even then he turned his face away. Are his memories less sweet than he? In fact, I think he has become dearer. He has left your lap and gone into the heart. He has not gone away anywhere; he has just gone inside, where he is not affected by heat and the cold or even disease. Why should you weep then?"

Meanwhile, on January 9, 1932, Premchand's cousin Baldevlal (67) died in Banaras. This was a severe blow to him—the cousin's family was not at all provided for; "there are now two widows in the house. What would happen to the two children who are so young?" His health was weak, but after making his wife promise that she won't leave the house lest she should be among those arrested without warrants, he went to Banaras for condolence. When the two widows saw him, they wept bitterly. He got one hundred rupees and gave it to them.

"Why do you weep?" he said. "For whom other than my relatives do I live? Don't tell the children that their father is dead. Till now I have been the father of three children. From now on I am the father of five. Whenever you want anything, please let me know." Opposed to extravagance on death ceremonies, he told them not to waste money on useless conventions and to do the ceremonies in a simple manner. "My wife, for

all I know, might have been arrested," he told them. "I am going now but will shift back to Banaras soon." He returned from Lucknow on May 12, 1932.

The civil disobedience movement was continuing. Tempers were still sufficiently high. When a month earlier, Mrs. Motilal Nehru, seated on a chair at the head of a procession in connection with the observance of the National Week, was knocked down from her chair and hit repeatedly on the head with canes, bleeding profusely from an open wound in her head, and fainted and lay down on the roadside, Premchand wrote to Nigam: "Government's repressive measures have now become unbearable. How disgraceful was the behaviour towards Jawaharlal's mother! I feel ashamed that I am still out of prison."

## Jagaran : A Foster Child

PREMCHAND'S FINANCIAL POSITION continued to be bad. That his income from the Hindi and Urdu books during a quarter of a century had not been much is clear from a statement that he had prepared a few months earlier in reply to a question.

For his *Sevasadan*, *Premashram*, *Sangram*, *Sapta Saroj* and *Prem Pachisi*, he said, he had got a lump sum of Rs. 3,000 from the Hindi Pustak Agency. *Nava Nidhi* had brought him Rs. 200. For his *Rangabhoomi*, the Ganga Pustak Mala had paid him Rs. 1,800. The stocks of *Kayakalpa*, *Pratigya*, *Azad Katha* and *Prem Pratima*, which he had himself published, lay in the press and had yielded him hardly Rs. 600.

From the Urdu translations of most of his works he had got Rs. 2,000. This included *Gosha-i-Afiat* and *Chaugan-i-Hasti* which he had given away for Rs. 800. Indicative of the state of affairs is the fact that *Bevah*, the Urdu version of *Pratigya*, brought out at the author's cost in May 1932, was so badly printed that Premchand explained that its different sections had been handled by different presses. He had himself to get the imprint line printed and to request the booksellers, as also *Zamana*, to paste it so that the lapse was remedied.

*Parda-i-Majaz* was published early in 1932 by a Lahore publisher who neither sent him the money nor the copies of the book, nor even a reply to his letters. "In fact," wrote Premchand, "I am wondering if he is keeping fit."

The translation work that Premchand had done, it seems, also did not bring him ready cash. The Hindustani Academy,\*

\*"The academy is perhaps of the view that the translations are poor," he told Nigam. "Babu Mahavir Prasad Saxena had told me that when he met Dr. Tara Chand a few days earlier, the latter had expressed the view that the translations had not been a success. I am apprehensive lest the same is true of the Urdu translations also, and lest our labours should go waste." Again: "Babu Har Prasad has just come out of jail

for whom he had translated Galsworthy's plays, did not pay him promptly. He had also undertaken the translation of a book on world history—probably for a textbook committee in Punjab—which seems to have been rejected. And, of course, he was now translating *Ghaban* from Hindi into Urdu.

The book market in India was extremely sluggish in 1932. According to Premchand, "books just don't sell."

The situation seems to have been saved by the earnings from one or two books that had been prescribed as textbooks in schools. This indeed could be the only steady source of income. And we find Premchand devoting considerable attention—at the cost of his next novel *Godan*—to preparing readers for schools, which, if accepted, would mean no worry for the next few years.

Premchand also entered into an arrangement for the preparation of textbooks. A plan was drawn up. "Two of the authors are from the Muir College; another one resides in Mussoorie; yet another in Raipur or Narshinghpur. I am the most needy and have, therefore, agreed to do the proof-reading. Printing hasn't yet been started. Whether the books would be ready before (the target date of) July is doubtful."

His book *Ba Kamaalon ke Darshan*, which was submitted to the textbook committee, had been rejected. Premchand thought it had not been accepted because there were few Muslim leaders included in it. In the next edition, sketches of Muslim leaders were included ("of these sketches, Akbar's was taken from Ali Mirza, Vasiuddin Salim and Sharar from *Zamana*"). The new edition of the book, he now thought, would be suitable as a textbook for schools. "It will again be presented to the textbook committee and is in a bad way. He has sent me a heart-rending letter. What can I tell him? I have no idea about the latest position. Have you glanced through them? Cannot the proposition of an advance be mooted at the Academy? If there is no way out, please get Rs. 100 as advance from them and send the amount on to him. He is in great difficulty. I am helpless, even though I know that this helplessness is temporary. Kindly keep in mind the delay there has been. It is perhaps more than one and a half years now. I have given up making promises." Yet again: "I am hesitant to write on the subject again, lest you should think that I am impatient. When, however, I think of the condition of Har Prasad, I become helpless. At this time one hundred means a lakh to him. Even for me one hundred are more than a hundred. For you, however, one hundred mean fifty only. I pray to God that you may pay some attention to this."

committee," he wrote to Nigam, "and I shall expect you to put in a good word for it and to get it selected."

*Hans*, which had been started to provide enough work to the Saraswati Press, was not only a losing concern but also an uncertain one. These were the days of ordinances, and none could be certain of the morrow. In June 1932, Premchand planned to bring out a special issue of *Hans* but was afraid lest the ordinance be promulgated again and he be "bound down hand and foot." And he was not wrong. Within six weeks we find him telling Jainendra Kumar that "a new ordinance has been promulgated, and security has been demanded of *Hans*. With the withdrawal of the old ordinance, I had thought that the demand for security would also lapse. We had even started printing the June-July issue. With the promulgation of the new ordinance, however, the demand for security has been renewed. When the manager went to file a fresh declaration, the district magistrate refused to accept the declaration and asked for security. Now I have sent a declaration to the government. The issue is printed, bound and ready to be dispatched. But it can be dispatched only if permission is given. In the event of refusal of permission, the position will become really difficult. I have no money, no treasury bills, and no securities. And I have no intention of borrowing. This is the beginning of the journal's new year. If 400 VPPs were sent and accepted, these would have brought in some money. But that is not to be."

Frequent closure of *Hans* denied the press of the job work for which in fact the journal had been started. It was natural, therefore, that Premchand should turn to his favourite idea of having a weekly journal of his own. And before he could think it over well, came a proposition his way.

*Jagaran*, a fortnightly, had been started from Banaras early in 1932. Even after eleven issues, its subscribers' list had not crossed the 200 mark. The paper was publicised, but with little result. The advertisement revenue was next to nothing. The owner, Vinod Shankar Vyas, having suffered a loss, had decided to close it down. As an alternative, he offered it to Premchand and told him: "Your decision will, in fact, decide whether *Jagaran* lives or dies."

Premchand accepted the offer and the journal's twelfth issue (July 1932) carried an announcement that the following issue

would appear under the editorship of Premchand from the Saraswati Press.

"I have lost several thousand rupees in running *Hans*," Premchand wrote to Jainendra Kumar. "But I could not resist the temptation of having a weekly of my own. I'll try to make it a popular one. It is just possible that this too may mean a loss of several thousand rupees. But I am helpless. Life has been a series of losses. If this one gets going, there would be little complaint of lack of job work for the press. In the initial stages, I know, I shall be snowed under with work, but I propose to engage an editorial assistant later on, so that all I have to do is to write editorials only."

*Jagaran*'s first issue as a weekly—not a fortnightly—appeared on August 22, 1932. Of the weekly's aims, Premchand wrote that it was distressing to note that a cultural and literary centre like Banaras did not have a single Hindi weekly journal. "With pen in hand, and national good at heart, with hopes of co-operation from friends and writers, we have entered this field. We have no organisation, little experience, and of money there has always been a great dearth. Whether, therefore, we swim or we sink, is in the hands of God."

An editorial entitled "*Jagaran* in a New Garb," said: "This journal was born in a good family. It was brought up in good hands. Experts knew that the child was promising. In the limited field of literature, they thought, it had not done as well as it should have. But a growing child cannot be kept in the cradle. Its parents, therefore, had to think of a governess who could handle it sternly, and feed it, not on delicacies, but on the barest minimum. In this age only that child goes forward who has undergone starvation and privations; the plant kept in a vase cannot stand the rigours of sun and rain; it is only the plant on a rock that can stand the hot weather, the hailstorm, the loo and the rain—and still flourish.

"I am not well versed in this art. In fact, until now I have nourished only one, and that too has run into difficulties and suffered two severe blows. I know the difficulties in bringing up a naughty child. But then who would turn down the gift of a child? I said to myself, let me try my luck with this new one; this may be the instrument to set things right for me. The world may not call me its father, but at least I could claim to

have made it a useful member of society. I desire, however, that while it may not bring me good name, it ought not to disgrace itself, lest the people should blame me."

There was nothing spectacular about the journal's progress within the next few months. One hundred subscribers or so left off. Run single-handed, the journal took away most of the time at his disposal. "*Jagaran* is losing heavily," he told Nigam. "Let's see which way the wind blows."

*Jagaran's* issue dated October 26, 1932, carried a short story entitled *Us ka Ant* for the publication of which a security of Rs. 2,000 was demanded. "I was distressed," he wrote to Jainendra Kumar, "and rushed to Lucknow, explained the meaning of the story to the Chief Secretary and gave him proofs of loyalty (!). I hope that the order for security is withdrawn." Thanks to the efforts of Pannalal—and the Chief Secretary, Buckford—the order was withdrawn. Premchand expressed regrets for the publication of the story and assured that his intention was to eulogise non-violence against coercion.

*Jagaran* could not stand on its feet. It just crawled. "I am working so hard that I cannot do more than this." "The future appears to be frightening," he told Jainendra Kumar.

It was suggested to Premchand that he should discontinue *Jagaran*. "I have thought over it more than once, but having suffered a loss of some Rs. 3,000 on this journal, I find it difficult to discontinue. The sale of books is disappointing. Literary creations anyway are an uncertain affair. One cannot depend on them. They also require a calmness of mind and an atmosphere which is elusive in my present state of affairs. The press has got to be run. I have invested my (step) brother's money and cannot shake off my responsibilities. There is very little job work in Banaras. And whatever little there is, is taken up by the cheaper presses. The Saraswati Press, therefore, has to be provided with work. *Jagaran* provides work worth Rs. 400 a month on an average, which means that it pays for the establishment of the press. The paper used for *Jagaran*, which comes to about Rs. 150 a month, has to be met from out of *Hans* and the sale of my books every month."

"It is a pity none of my ventures is yet paying its way," he wrote to Banarsi Das Chaturvedi. "*Hans* is not losing much now, but *Jagaran's* losses are mounting. What is taxing



my brain is how to get out of this situation. Every month I am losing two hundred rupees. And how long can this go on? Having done the folly of starting it once, vanity stands in the way of my closing it down. Wouldn't others chuckle and giggle?"

To Jainendra: "*Jagaran* can become a paying concern, if I could get one hundred rupees a month. . . . I hope that, by the end of the second year, it will cease to be a burden. . . . Why don't you help me a bit? A weekly journal can certainly be made to pay. There are already one or two such journals. If we could give richer fare and exert our influence to secure some advertisements, we could push our publications also. There will then be no need to seek publishers. The world is for the pushing and the energetic who can make the most of their opportunities. You can dash off a column or two on everyday topics in the form of notes or jottings. It is indeed a pity that, with brains such as ours, we fail to successfully run a weekly."

Success of newspapers and journals, Premchand knew, depended upon advertisement revenue. His friends advised him to launch an advertisement campaign as was being done by most of the English and Hindi newspapers. "I know the value of advertisements," said Premchand, "but ideals cannot live on hopes of profit. *Hans* is a literary journal and has been started keeping in view certain objectives which must be pursued till the end. We cannot, therefore, publish advertisement of a type other than literary, for, that is the way of the journals started with commercial objectives."

In regard to *Jagaran*, however, Premchand was prepared to deviate from this and to accept advertisements. We find him telling Jainendra Kumar: "Please meet Mr. Birla and impress upon him the importance of the work that we are doing and the sufferings and troubles that we have to go through. He is a very big advertiser. He has his cloth mills, his jute manufactures and insurance business to advertise. Why can't he extend his patronage to such an enterprise as ours?"

"And let me tell you that if you think that ease and affluence will come of its own accord and the Goddess of Wealth will be so enamoured of your talents as to fall at your feet, you are living under an illusion. Either give up all worldly ambitions and become a *sanyasi*, or, being a *grihasthi*, with a family to sup-

port, be up and doing. When an old wretch like myself with far greater domestic cares, can do all this single-handed, a man of talents like yourself can do wonders."

A fortnight later: "*Jagaran* would have paid if I could improve its get-up and its contents and give a few pictures. I shall, however, have to make up for the lack of finances by spending more time. I want you to feel that you are running this journal and are an equal partner—not in losses but in profits only. If this venture were a success, we won't have to look up to publishers. And if both of us cannot make it a success, it would certainly be a matter for the deepest regret.

"I had asked you to meet Birla, if not for your own sake, then for mine. Show him copies of the two journals and persuade him. You can tell him that it is running in loss and, with a little help, can become very useful. Birla owns many mills. A page of advertisement is of no consequence to him. To us, however, it means a help of fifty rupees a month. This world, my friend, is not for the quiet fatalists. Right up to the end we have to fight. Shy persons like me have no place. For Heaven's sake, don't cultivate these habits. . . . So far as I am concerned, I don't want to lose heart. I would have devoted myself wholeheartedly even to agriculture, had I taken to it."

And to Chaturvedi: "If I could secure some good advertisements, I could perhaps pull through. Could you not help me out? There is the Bengal Chemical Works, advertising extensively. If you could approach them to advertise in the columns of *Jagaran*, or if some friend of yours could secure me advertisements, you will be putting me under great obligation. The Birla Brothers, with their jute manufacturing concerns, are great advertisers. You can tell them on my behalf that if I could secure an income of Rs. 100 per month the situation could be saved. For my personal needs I don't have to worry much. My books and writings provide me with a living wage. The problem that faces me is how to keep these journals going. If I had the courage to stop them, I could be saved of these bothe-rations. . . . I have made an open breast to you as a friend and hope the confidence is kept."

## Cavillers and Detractors

PREMCHAND WAS A non-conformist. He gave equal respect to Rama, Lord Krishna, Mohammed, Buddha and Christ, who, according to him, were all great men and worthy of emulation. He hated dogma and meaningless conventions and rituals practised by the different sections of the Indian society—Hindus, Muslims and Christians—and expressed his views without fear or favour. As we have seen, he ridiculed such practices as *kanyadan*, the shibboleths of Brahmin priests and Muslim *mullahs*. Such views became points of controversy. Followers of different faiths attacked him. Hostility of priestly classes was marked. This he countered. Fanaticism of priestly Brahmins and mullahs, according to him, posed a grave danger to the country's advance.

Some of Premchand's articles in *Jugaran* of Banaras, also involved him in such controversies. Hindus, he thought, were as much responsible for the communal differences as the Muslims. "Why should they object to the sacrifice of old decrepit cows when they do not object to the sacrifice of a goat?"

Once when an article by him offended the Hindu residents of the city, they called him a "convert from Hinduism" and threatened violence against his person. Premchand, however, refused to be cowed down. The threat, he said, came from the Hindu extremists who were masquerading as Congressmen.

"Why should you write what offends one section or the other?" asked Mrs. Premchand. "Sometimes it is the government that is annoyed, and at others it is the public."

"Both the public as well as the government wish to consider the writer to be their stooge. If the writer wrote as others wished him to, he could not be a writer and retain his individuality. His is a difficult task. If he offends the government, they put him in jail; if he offends the public, they threaten him with violence. Should the writer then give up writing? No, he should not. Whatever he writes is out of the deep anguish from within. Pity

is that these people's minds are closed and they have entrenched themselves everywhere. But I am not at all worried about their threats. If I were, I won't be writing. If a writer were to worry about such threats, how can he give a lead to the people."

Premchand's conduct of the journals, particularly of *Jagaran*, also involved him into some unnecessary controversies, either because he had little time to see what was published in his journals or because he took cudgels on behalf of certain controversial figures. One of these personalities was Banarsi Das Chaturvedi, the editor of *Vishal Bharat*, the sister publication in Hindi of the *Modern Review*. Chaturvedi, who had met Premchand once in 1924 or so, had carried on correspondence (mostly in English!) with him in connection with his contributions to *Vishal Bharat*. While, however, Premchand wrote quite frequently for *Vishal Bharat*, Chaturvedi did not write anything for *Hans*. And Premchand asked a common friend: "Would you very kindly request Chaturvedi, if possible on bended knees, on my behalf, to write a page or two for *Hans*? During its two years of existence, *Hans* has not drawn a single line from him. There must be some deeper reason than want of leisure. Certainly, it would not be scandalous if he does *Hans* this honour. *Hans* does not aspire to be a competitor of *Vishal Bharat*. I write for *Vishal Bharat* not because it pays, but because I have a regard for the gentleman, which I have for very few journalists. Others are equally ready to pay me, but I turn my back to them."

Chaturvedi did not write much for *Hans*, but had the fullest of cooperation from Premchand. When, for instance, he planned to bring out a short story number of *Vishal Bharat*, Premchand advised him to invite contributions from Jainendra Kumar, Sudarshan, Kaushik, Dwij and Bireshwar Singh. "You may also invite Gujerati, Bengali, Urdu and Marathi story writers to write one story in each vernacular. There should also be translations from contemporary story-writers of Europe and America. An article on the essentials of short story will not be out of place."

The two editors—of *Hans* and *Vishal Bharat*—exchanged notes about controversial articles relating to writers, including themselves, published in different, literary journals. Here are some unedited extracts from one of Premchand's letters (in English) dated November 19, 1932:

"I have always regarded you as my sincerest friend and you are one of my literary advisers whose criticism I value most, as they are sympathetic and always based on sound judgement. The critical appreciation is no consolation to writers as you know yourself and it is the enlightened friends whom he always keeps before his eyes. You need not have taken the trouble to mention all what you have done for me. I cannot forget them in my life. I have always fought on your side whenever any occasion has arisen, and have tried to interpret you as I see you. I do not deny that among literary men there are some who disparage you and do not give credit for your honesty of purpose. Nay, some go far beyond that. But who has not got cavillers? I am myself surrounded by detractors who would not miss an opportunity to hit me. Unfortunately, our literary workers do not possess the breadth of view and the spirit of fellowship. There is a class of men who delight in ruining the reputation others have taken years to build up. But what of that? We have got to keep our conscience clear and it is all that matters. You seem to take the humorous touches rather too seriously. I admit I did not read the Tunti Raj article nor Khairati Khan's. You know Khairati Khan has rather unceremoniously handled me in *Aaj*. But I took it in a chivalrous spirit. The matter grows serious when one imputes motives. This I would never tolerate in any case. Innocent flings you need not mind. If you are so touchy, you will give an impetus to the detractors to prick your back. Face them with a smile on your face. There was a time when an unfriendly cut kept me awake nights together. But that stage has passed and I know myself much better now. There will be differences always, but why should we worry? All will not admire me. How can it be said that whatever I have written is flawless. . . . Prasadji is a lovable person. Now that I see him closely, I find him much against what I thought of him a year before. Misunderstandings can only be cleared by close association. I assure you I have the highest opinion of you. Nothing can shake it. What I would not give to clear the atmosphere of jealousy and narrow-mindedness! We have to apply breadth of views. You know the principle better than I do."

Premchand accepted Chaturvedi's advice to exercise restraint in his writings. "I am really grateful to you for your most friend-

ly advice," he wrote back. "I cherish no ill-will against the person. I rather feel for him. But Hindi readers are so shallow and uncritical that they are always led to believe in the most nonsensical things dinned into their ears. One must tell them the truth. But I shall exercise greater control henceforth."

Chaturvedi visited Premchand in January 1933 and stayed with him at his Benia Bagh house for two days, when "discussions continued from eleven o'clock in the morning till ten o'clock at night on the first day and from ten o'clock in the morning till late in the evening of the second day." Some of the questions and answers recorded by Chaturvedi would bear repetition.

Q. "Who are the foreign short story writers who have influenced our writers most?"

A. "The influence of the Russian short stories has been the deepest. We had few adventure stories so far. The detective stories are also very few. And those that are there are not original. They are mere imitations of Conan Doyle or others. The science of crime detection has not grown in our country so far."

Q. "Who is the best short story writer in the world?"

A. "Chekhov."

Q. "Which, according to you, is the best story?"

A. "This is a difficult question to answer, because I forget the names. I liked Tolstoy's\* story of two pilgrims. And I also liked Chekhov's story where a mother stitches wedding dress and also mourning veil for her daughter. Tagore's *Drishhti Dan* is so good that it compares favourably with the best in the world."

Q. "What do you think of *Kabuliwala*?"

A. "It is, undoubtedly, a first-rate story. Its appeal is universal. The portrayal of the Indian woman's character in *Drishhti Dan* is unparalleled. Some of the stories of Guy de Maupassant are very good, but the difficulty with them is that they are steeped in sex."

Q. "What do you think of Turgenev in comparison with Tolstoy?"

A. "Turgenev is a pigmy before Tolstoy."

Premchand thought highly of other Russian writers also. Speaking of Alexander Kuprin's *Yama The Pit*, he told Jainendra

\*Premchand translated selected stories of Tolstoy into Hindi—*Tolstoi ki Kahani*.

Kumar, not long afterwards, that it was a very powerful book. "At places," he added, "I could not read it. I could not control myself, and at one place I could not but weep. . . ." The scene came to him vividly, and he found it difficult to control himself. "When I came to such and such a passage," said Premchand, "I could not go on, Jainendra. The book slipped out of my hands." And he started narrating the scene, with great stress within. Says Jainendra Kumar: "I saw that he could not complete the sentence. His speech became incoherent and he suddenly stopped. His face became pale, ashen white. There was a pin-drop silence. He was almost overpowered with emotion. His face became, as it were, deformed. Something within was twitching. He had been deeply shaken. And he started weeping, tears rolled down his eyes. It took some time before he regained his composure. He felt ashamed of the sight he presented. 'Jainendra,' he said . . . and could not complete the sentence. A few minutes later, with tears still flowing down his cheeks and his moustaches, he said, 'I could not read further.' "

It needs to be added here that Premchand always saw the mother in woman. The scene, possibly, was the one where the prostitute who suffers from an incurable disease does not sell her body to a young army officer because she feels that she must not infect the young man who had aroused motherly feelings in her!

Chaturvedi's account of the two days with Premchand was published in *Vishal Bharat* of January 1933\* which, incidentally, was also the short story number.

One of the objects with which Chaturvedi had called on Premchand was to persuade him to visit Calcutta and Santiniketan, so that Premchand could meet Rabindranath Tagore and C.F. Andrews. The latter had agreed to vet the English version of Premchand's short stories. Premchand, who was a rather stay-at-home type and who had little money to throw away, pleaded his inability to visit Calcutta. Replying to a reminder, he wrote: "I am ready to come to Calcutta any time you like. Let it be some occasion. To come as a sightseer and expect others to finance it is ridiculous. When there is some occasion, you will find me there with wife." Premchand, however, requested

\*Surprisingly enough, from a writer of Chaturvediji's standing, the reprint of the article in *Rekhachitra* mentions the date as January 1932!

Jainendra Kumar to go round various places and even published his note on a visit to Santiniketan in *Hans*.

Chaturvedi's visit to Banaras also enabled him to get acquainted with the writer's wife and his subsequent letters throw some light on her standing as a writer. Her income from writings, it seems, was very little. Asked why he did not buy her a wrist watch, Premchand wrote back that she would perhaps manage to buy one when some "enterprising journalist" begins to pay her for her contributions. As to her then recently published collection of 16 short stories, *Nari Hridaya*, he wrote to Chaturvedi that she would be delighted if he reviewed it in *Vishal Bharat*. "She has received scant justice from the literary world yet. This is because I overshadow her, or may be because some wiseacres think that I am the real author. I do not deny that I am responsible for the literary finish, but the conception and the execution is entirely hers. A militant woman speaks in every line. A man of my peaceful disposition could not conceive of such aggressively womanish plots."

As from one editor to another: "I was guessing who this Mani Ram could be, and there was a distant suspicion in my mind about this gentleman. It is now clear. The fellow is writing stories these days and trying to storm the Hindi world, but so far, his attempts seem to have failed. . . . I have not seen . . . but from its advertisement appearing in *Chitrapat*, I can well see what it is. This is most mischievous and a mean enterprise to spread communalism and must be exposed. I was thinking of writing myself after I have read the book; and now that you have taken up the matter, I am heart and soul with you. Never mind, we are in a minority. Our cause is sacred. I am giving your note in *Jagaran*, as *Hans* for July is completed. If you could send me the book I would write a whole editorial on the subject."

And to Jainendra: "What has happened to this fellow Chatursen (Shastri) that he has written *Islam ka Vish Vriksha*? You review the book and also send me a copy of the book. I have asked Chaturvediji to take up this matter. We shall have to counter this communal propaganda effectively. And this fellow Rishabh also wishes to earn money through these dubious means! Did you see that note in *Saraswati*? I understand from Banarsi Das (Chaturvedi) that this has been inspired by Shastriji. I am



an old man now and have written all that I could, and my friends made all possible efforts to boost me up. But why this attitude towards you?"

The understanding between Premchand and Chaturvedi is shown in the controversy that arose around an article published in *Saraswati* of August 1933. The article entitled "My Literary Pilgrimage to Calcutta," was written by Thakur Shrinath Singh, joint editor of *Saraswati*. In this article, based on an "interview" with the editor of *Vishal Bharat*, the author had made fun of Chaturvedi's pride and airs and the manner of his running the journal. Through words supposed to have been uttered by Chaturvedi, he ran down a number of established writers, e.g. Mata Din Shukla, Jainendra Kumar and Premchand, and criticised an article by Shiv Pujan Sahai on Dwivediji published in Premchand's *Jagaran*. "I see," Chaturvedi was quoted as saying, "that Premchand is thoroughly irresponsible. The fun made in *Jagaran* of Bhagwati Charan Verma on the occasion of his wife's death was so vulgar that no responsible editor would give it a place in his journal." The hullabaloo raised over this (first instalment of) article was so fierce that the second part was dropped.

"The humorous note in *Jagaran*," Premchand wrote to Chaturvedi, "appeared absolutely in my ignorance. Believe me, I never for a moment believed in all the nonsense written in *Saraswati*. I at once understood that it was jobbery and foul play from the beginning to end. The fellow has tried to create hostility between yourself and the whole world. But, excuse me, you too should always be on your guard against such unscrupulous self-seekers. Never say anything which you don't mean seriously. I am going to write a note on this interview in *Hans*. You should seek redress in a court of law. The situation demands it. When he did not say clearly that he was taking an interview for paper and did not show you the copy of the interview, how can he put such horrible things in your mouth and injure your reputation beyond recovery?"

Premchand, who characterised the interview as "vulgar and full of exaggerations," written by a class of people who were after cheap notoriety through sensational journalism, was piqued. In his editorial note entitled "Literary Goondaism" published in *Hans*, he explained the technique of interview as practised in

Europe whence it had come to India. Interview, he said, was different from unguarded social talk which was not meant to be published without the prior approval in writing from the person interviewed. He ascribed the article to be a part of the dubious plan to build up circulation. "A man takes to such ways only when he is in a crisis, and if that be so, that man deserves sympathy. If, however, he makes unfounded allegations to satisfy some mean craving, he is to be condemned." The author of the article, Premchand wrote, "had met me and, in his discussion with me, has run down so many eminent people of Allahabad that if I put all that down in cold print, he would feel embarrassed. . . . But then it is meaner to mention these things than to say them. By saying what he is, Shrinath Singh is doing good neither to literature, nor to *Saraswati*, nor even to himself, and is disgracing the class of editors as such."

The appearance of this note provoked *Saraswati* to hit back. "We have respected Premchand," it wrote, "because at one time he was a tolerably good writer. . . . But we have never admired his trash and have at times exposed the market-place nature of some of his works." Premchand, the journal rubbed in, had deteriorated considerably and from a writer he had assumed the role of a publisher and a bookseller. He knew nothing of the technique of an interview and was only a "self-styled editor."

*Saraswati* also took to task J. P. Nirmal, the Associate Editor of *Bharat* of Allahabad, for his article on the subject of interview, etc. in his bi-weekly paper.

The fiercest attack by *Saraswati*'s joint editor was yet to come in its December 1933 issue in which, writing under the caption "Premchand: A Preacher of Hatred," Shrinath Singh tried to debunk Premchand. He asked the author as to who had given him the title of "Upanyas Samrat" (novel laureate) that was printed on his books. He highlighted the "fact" that even a writer like Sarat Chandra Chatterjee had not heard of Premchand, and that, despite this, the latter had expected to be invited by Tagore himself to Santiniketan! Premchand, Shrinath Singh added, was not a patch on the great writers who had won the Nobel prize because they had shown love, sympathy and vision.

Into the controversy was dragged the name of Mrs. Premchand whose *Nari Hridaya* had appeared about a year earlier. It was

hinted that Premchand, and not his wife, was the real author of the stories published under her name.

Premchand's milieu, it was held, was European, and he did not have his roots in the soil of India. His portrayal of Indian village life was full of vulgarities and quite Kiplingsque in its character.

In particular, Shrinath Singh quoted parts of a short story *Sadgati* (1931), and said that if in fifty years from then, Premchand's books were to be taken as representative of this age, readers of his books would then think that Hindus of this age, and in particular the Brahmins, "led a life full of hatred . . . that the Brahmins of India were the most tyrannical, selfish, hypocritical and deserved to be hated."

It may also be mentioned here that a Brahmin member of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan of Allahabad, asked Ram Vriksha Benipuri, "why he, a Brahmin, was getting mixed up with the supporters of a Kayastha (Premchand)!"

Replying to *Saraswati's* allegation, Premchand wrote that "I do not wish to disgrace the high position of a Brahmin by giving this appellation to every mercenary priest. The harm done by this distorted money-making profession of religiosity not only to our society but also to the nation is clear from the hoax as perpetrated by the Varnashram Swarajya Sangh. The more is the hatred preached against such an unsocial, anti-national, inhuman organisation, the less it is. The hatred should not be against individuals, but against trends or organisations. The defenders of Varnashram are of the same class as our critic."

The campaign incidentally found an echo in journals published in other Indian languages too. Although, for instance, the Marathi newspapers and periodicals had reviewed *Karmabhoomi* favourably—the *Kesari* lavished "warm praise"—the *Kaumudi*, a Gujarati periodical, carried a critical article by one Kishen Singha.

When the editor, M. G. Joshi, drew Premchand's attention to it, Premchand wrote (in English): "Every writer is free to admire a certain author or to disparage him. I have no remarks to offer, except that Mr. Kishen Singha seems under the impression that it is I who am appropriating the title of 'Upanyas Samrat.' Nobody abhors this title as I do, and I have never prompted anybody to call me by that name. In fact, I don't know how

this title was prefixed to my name and why it is being repeated so often.

“Comparisons are always invidious; and Mr. Kishen Singha is quite right when he says that those who are bold enough to compare myself with Galsworthy and Tolstoy and other luminaries of the literary world, certainly do me an injustice. I am the last man to entertain that foolish notion. But how can I stop things of that nature?

“Mr. Kishen Singha might be quite right in his holding the opinion that most of my stories are tame and without any beauty. Perhaps the stories that he selected for translation are exceptions. What can I say to this? There are readers who do not tolerate even Victor Hugo and Tolstoy. I can say in all humility that I have done what I could to the best of my talents, and I do not lay claim to anything greater.

“Mr. Kishen Singha’s chief objection seems to be that *Karmabhoomi* has been written with the background of a national movement. He seems to forget that almost all great novels have some social purpose of some great movement as their background. What is Tolstoy’s *War and Peace* but a history of Napoleon’s rush on Moscow? But Tolstoy has made the struggle live in his pages. He has introduced characters and incidents which reveal his marvellous insight into human nature. It is the development of character which counts above everything else and, if the author is successful in this sphere, he has nothing to fear from the critics. Does the author bring into play finer and deeper emotions? If he does this, no matter what his background, he is dealing with the eternal and deserves to live long. . . . However, as I said in the beginning, everybody has a right to hold and express his own opinion, and there was never a good work which was not criticised. I am sure some Gujarati man of letters will do me justice and present me before Gujarati public in a better light.

“In Hindi, one or two papers have begun a campaign against myself. It is a pity that the literary circle too is torn by personal prejudices. There are parties and factions and, if you happen to admire one party, you may rest assured that the other party will penalise you for your venturing in this forbidden field. *Saraswati* of Allahabad has written an article against me and Mr. Kishen Singha seems to have been inspired by that article.

"You should select Mr. Kishen Singha to translate\* *Karmabhoomi*; and he might be at peace. It is quite possible he might be grudging that he was not entrusted with this work.

"Good advertisement is the soul of success; and you should arrange that, no sooner is *Karmabhoomi* out, than it should be reviewed by a number of journals and men of letters. This step is sure to make this venture successful, as you yourself must have experienced."

The controversy, joined in by others, continued.

And Premchand continued his thrusts mercilessly. In his articles in *Jagaran*, he lifted the curtain from the hideous way the Hindu dead bodies are treated before and during cremation; he exposed the deceit of the *sadhus* and *mahatmas*, the hypocrisy of the priests and *mahants* and the debauchery in the temples, the fraud of the *yagnas* and *havans* to cheat the honest and the simple-hearted folk. His opponents also hit back with vehemence.

Attacks came from the Muslim communalists also. The story *Mandir aur Masjid*, which had been published in 1925, was reproduced by some journals, and *Azad* (Nigam's weekly) lifted it from there, made some changes and published it. There was tremendous commotion in some fanatical circles, especially a journal of Kanpur. Wrote Premchand to Nigam: "*Dair-o-Haram* is certainly my story. It had appeared in Urdu, under some different title. *Zindagi*, while reproducing it, has murdered the story. And the calligraphist of *Zamana* has gone further to flog the dead horse. However, I don't see how anyone could pick holes in this story. All that it has done is to expose the mentality of the fanatics without any fear or favour. While, on the one hand, we see the doings of the Hindu pandits and priests, on the other, we see exposed the communalism of the Muslim mullahs. Both are victims of selfishness. If some people do not like it, what can I do?"

The thrusts against the malpractices in the Hindu society were especially sharp, and the priestly class of Allahabad was up in arms against Premchand.

"Did you see the article I wrote in *Jagaran* as a retort to Mr. Nirmal?" he asked Chaturvedi. "This Nirmal is a man without any principle whatsoever. When the fortnightly *Jagaran*

\*The Gujarati translation was by Manaklal Govind Joshi, illustrated by Kannu Desai; publishers: Gurjar Granth Ratna Karyalaya, Ahmedabad.

was in Babu Shiv Pujan Sahai's hands, a certain controversy arose between myself and *Jagaran*. It was in connection with something Pandit Nand Dulare Bajpai wrote. Nirmal then contributed an article to *Jagaran*, disparaging my work and advising me to refrain from writing anything more, as I was out of date and my days were past. Shiv Pujan Sahai did not print this article. Some time after when *Jagaran* came in my hands, this same Nirmal wrote an article eulogising me to the skies, which I printed. This shows what stuff he is made of. He has accused me of impugning Brahmins as a class, simply because I have ridiculed some of the hypocrisies of these priests and mahants and religious loafers. He calls them Brahmins, little thinking how much they are discrediting decent Brahmins. My ideal of the Brahmin is sacrifice and service, whoever he may be. Hypocrisy and dogmatism and playing upon the credulity of simple Hindu folk, these *pujaris* and *pandas* I regard as a curse on the Hindu society and responsible for our degradation. They are only good for ridicule and this is what I have done. These Nirmals and others of his ilk, although parading as nationalists, are at heart imbued with all the failings of the priestly classes and cursing us who are trying to bring in a better state of things."

Chaturvedi, it seems, had offered to arbitrate. Premchand wrote: "I could not quite follow what you are going to arbitrate and what the charges against me are. Is it the stories wherein I have ridiculed these hypocrites? Do read please. They are not too many. Ridicule consists in exaggeration, and this I have done. But it is good humoured, totally free from gibe and malice."

An idea of the temper of Hindi controversialists can be had from the outburst in the Hindi newspapers and journals against Jawaharlal Nehru who was called an "ignoramus" for his "presumptuousness" in criticising Hindi and comparing it unfavourably with some of the provincial languages. This followed his informal talk with Hindi writers (Ratnakar Rasik Mandal) who presented Nehru with an address. Nehru had advised the Hindi writers to give up the courtly style of ornate Sanskritised language and to write for the masses, in other words, in a language understood by them. He also advised them to pay some attention to what was being written in the

West and, incidentally, mentioned that perhaps some Indian languages, e.g. Bengali, Gujarati and Marathi, were a little more advanced than "modern Hindi." His remarks, Nehru himself says, were sent to the Hindi press, and there was a tremendous outcry against him.

The controversy around the writings of Premchand any way did not die out. It seems to have been taken to the 23rd session of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, held in Delhi in the early part of 1934.

Premchand was not favourably inclined towards attending the session. The reception committee set up in Delhi was, however, keen to persuade Premchand to come to Delhi. They could ask no better a person than Jainendra Kumar to request the great writer. Jainendra Kumar obliged, and Premchand accepted the invitation "under protest."

"Jainendra Kumar would feel hurt if I don't go," Premchand told his wife, and caught the next train to be joined by others from Banaras and Allahabad. He was received by the volunteers and taken round, along with other delegates, through the important highways of Old Delhi in a procession and lodged in the Pataudi House in Daryaganj. Close by was the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan *pandal* put up within sight of the Red Fort.

After a bath, he made for the place where arrangements for boarding had been made. At the entrance of the boarding hall he was stopped. Asked a volunteer: "Where is your food ticket?"

"I don't have any ticket. Where can I get one?"

"If you wish to pay for it, the ticket can be had at the window over there."

Premchand went to the window and bought the ticket for eight annas and took his place at the end of the long queue, like any other person, and unlike any VIP.

It is also interesting to note that at the entry of the *pandal* at the sectional session of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan's Sahitya Parishad, presided over by Makhanlal Chaturvedi, Premchand was stopped by a volunteer who took him for a peasant. He quietly went and sat among the audience.

On the platform there was a controversy over his writings. The majority hailed Premchand as the Tolstoy of Hindi literature. A small section, however, referred to his alleged role of "preacher

of hatred." There was a little altercation which provoked poet Balkrishan Sharma "Naveen" to get up and say that while his critics would be dead and forgotten, Premchand's name would be immortal. And while the arguments went on, there was this man sitting among the thousands present, lost in watching the kites flying!

It was at the end of the day's session of one of the sectional meetings that someone among the crowd recognised Premchand.

"This is Premchand," he shouted.

"Yes, this is Premchand," echoed a few others.

The scene at the meeting of the Galpa Sammelan, presided over by Kamlabai Kibe, also seems to have been unbecoming of the occasion. In sharp contrast to the jealousies and the display of partisanship by the "detractors" and "cavillers" was the warmth with which he was received outside the small coterie hostile to him. He attended several receptions and meetings held in his honour in Delhi.

The tribute paid to Premchand by Khwaja Hassan Nizami at a meeting at Indra Vidyavachaspati's house is worth mentioning. "There is not a single short story, novel or article in Urdu by Premchand," he said, "that I have not read. I am always on the lookout for something written by him. There have been various currents and cross currents in the life of our nation. The eyes of one community have been bloodshot against the other. Communalism perverted the outlook of most among us. In fact, how many of us were there who did not succumb to the all-pervading poisonous atmosphere? Premchand, in sharp contrast, stood firm and steadfast. His head was clear. So was his heart."

Organisers of the Sammelan had provided enough time for sightseeing. Premchand, along with Jainendra Kumar and Rishabhchandra Jain, went on a picnic and excursion to the Qutab Minar. The tower, said Premchand, was more impressive from the ground and would lose its grandeur if one saw it from the top. "It's better, therefore, if we don't go up."

(When he later got a copy of the group photograph taken on the occasion, he remarked: "My neck is tilted. But, then, so has been my luck.")

Premchand in Delhi was a great draw. Visitors called on him without any sense of time. Interviews, we are told, con-



tinued right up to ten or eleven in the morning. He—and the visitors—had to be reminded that it was late and that he had to go to the Sammelan meetings. Lost in discussions, he was oblivious of time and also of all personal comforts, clothing, food, drink, etc.

“Would you oil your hair?” someone would ask him. And he would reply casually: “If you so wish.”

“Would you change your shirt?”

“If you think so, I shall.”

When he visited the exhibition inaugurated on the occasion, he looked round, and then suddenly, but innocently, asked if there was a barber around!

One incident during his stay in Delhi that stands out is that, on the evening of the fourth day when he was scheduled to leave for Banaras on his return journey, the local Hindi Sabha had called a meeting to honour him. Premchand spoke for some two minutes. The meeting was about to come to a close. Just then a Punjabi youth from Lahore, looking harassed, jumped on to the stage, folded his hands and invited Premchand—and all those present!—to his house for a meal on the following day.

Everyone present was taken aback at this sudden and unusual request. Eyebrows were raised. “Ever since I read in the newspapers that Premchand is here in Delhi,” said the youth, “I have been making a frantic search for him. Until a few moments ago I could not find out where he was staying. It is after several years, and after two fruitless visits to Lucknow and one to Banaras with the sole object of meeting him, that I have now at last found him.

“I have been a great admirer of his writings. I had gone to Calcutta for a job. I fell on evil days. I had only one rupee. But I could not resist the temptation of buying the copy of a special number of an Urdu magazine at the railway station, which carried his story *Mantra*. I was extremely depressed, but his story elevated me, gave me courage, and it was then that I decided that I would not admit defeat in life. From that day onwards, I have gone ahead in life and never had an occasion to look back. Ever since that day, therefore, I have been anxious to have the *darshan* of this great writer. And what holds good in my case also holds good in the case of my wife who is now

lying bed-ridden. She is waiting anxiously to have his darshan. I leave it to you, gentleman, now to decide whether my request, and the request of my wife on death-bed, is worth kicking or accepting."

Needless to say, Premchand was persuaded to stay on for another couple of days.

From Delhi, Premchand went to Aligarh where the Aligarh University Old Boys Association had earlier invited him. Although the university was closed at the time, the reception extended to him was indeed very warm and he was pleased immensely. "I was surprised to see that so many of the girls at Aligarh do not observe any *purdah* and that almost all of them had read my *Ghahan*," he wrote to Jainendra Kumar. "I ate with them, and fed on pulao, meat dishes and other delicacies. . . . In fact, I did nothing but attend social functions. There were few chances of speaking. Back in Banaras, I had to take *nux vomica* for three or four days (to set my digestion in order)."

## Three Running Sores

WHILE PREMCHAND BORE the brunt of the attacks of his "cavillers" and "detractors" gallantly, much more formidable was the position created by the losses suffered by his *Hans*, *Jagaran* and, of course, the Saraswati Press, to feed which the journals had been started. The journals and the press had become running sores which drained away a good part of what he earned from his short stories, articles and the royalties. While the expenses on the two journals totalled up to five hundred rupees a month, the returns were no more than four hundred. Bills of outstandings on account of paper mounted. Premchand was unable to pay even the wage bill of the staff. The bad way in which the press was run is shown by the fact that the journals seldom appeared on schedule. In fact, at times the press would remain closed.

Consequently, Premchand was on the horns of a dilemma. He did not know what to do. The conflicting advice given by different friends seems to have made him feel uncertain about any proposal. Jainendra Kumar, for instance, proposed an increase in the number of pages of *Hans* as also in its subscription from four to six rupees a year. Jai Shankar Prasad asked Premchand to reconvert *Jagaran* into a fortnightly, at six rupees a year. The number of people with a literary bent of mind who could be enlisted as subscribers, some said, was limited and the only way to boost up the circulation among the public was to give more illustrations.

This period of Indian history had its own uncertainties too. Under the various ordinances in force "one got into trouble for trifles." As we have seen in an earlier chapter, security of two thousand rupees was demanded of *Jagaran* for the publication of a story entitled *Us ka Ant*, in October 1932. Within another eight months, we find security being demanded for the publication in *Hans* of a story entitled *Ek Krantikari ki Maan* by one Shiv Narain Tandon.

One of the other problems faced by the journals, especially *Hans*, was the pattern set by well-established journals in bringing out a large number of voluminous special issues every year. While journals like *Saraswati* and *Chand*, which had a large subscribers' list, could afford to spend lavishly on these special numbers, *Hans* was badly off and could not really afford to follow suit. Despite this, however, it had to fall in line with others and plan and issue special numbers and thus "join the ranks of the martyrs."

The October-November combined issue of *Hans*, entitled the "Kashi Ank," cost Premchand some Rs. 1,250—Rs. 400 on paper, Rs. 200 on blocks, Rs. 450 on printing and Rs. 200 on packing and postage. He banked upon this number bringing in new subscribers. Of the four hundred VPPs sent, however, only 175 were accepted by the addressees, the rest being returned. This meant a considerable loss to him, a pile of issues and general gloom in the office. "Not only was there no rain of money, but it did not result even in dew drops." The blow was very severe. He was "dazed." "All my hopes," he told Jainendra Kumar, "have disappeared; all my dreams melted."

As against the income of seven hundred rupees, he had to pay some two thousand rupees for paper alone—one thousand on account of *Hans* and another one thousand on account of *Jagaran*. While the two journals, according to Premchand's calculation, had together incurred a loss of four thousand rupees from 1930 to 1933, those on the press since its inception had totalled some ten thousand rupees. All these losses were in addition to the value of the time that was spent on reading proofs and could as well have been spent on writing. He had to break many pledges and also to alienate various friends whose money he had invested. While he had suffered the losses, these people wanted their money back. Raghupati Sahai Firaq, for instance, asked Premchand to return the balance of his investment (Rs. 400). Other creditors also wished to realise their dues from Premchand and his press. One of them, in fact, had secured a decree from a court of law.

While his creditors claimed their dues, his debtors turned a deaf ear to his reminders. By April 1934, we find, a bookseller from Lahore who owed him Rs. 150, a part of it from journalistic work, evading him. Another one in Lahore who owed him eight

hundred rupees—accumulated over a period of several years—would not even acknowledge his letters. Premchand suggested payment by instalment, but there was no response whatsoever from the bookseller. Premchand came to feel that it was a bad debt, and that the only way to realise the dues was through a law suit. “As he does not care even to acknowledge my letters, I had, much against my wish, to serve him with a registered notice!” The result: nil.

Premchand's sad plight can be guessed from the following extract from a letter to Nigam: “I have thought several times of troubling you. Knowing, however, that you have your own difficulties, I could not muster courage. I have now reached the last rung of the ladder of my resources, and it is under the greatest compulsion of circumstances that I ask you to give thought to the gravity of my situation, as if you were in it. The losses on the ‘Kashi Ank,’ I reckon, would go up to Rs. 1,000. (I have paid 500 to paper merchants against their dues of 2,000, and have still to pay 1,500). If I could pay off 500 immediately, the payment of the remaining amount could be delayed by six months or more. . . . You had agreed to pay me next October. If you could pay me Rs. 500 in January or February, I would be saved from a great embarrassment. The balance can be paid to me in October, as agreed to earlier. . . . Your credit has gone up recently, but I have none anywhere. . . . As you perhaps know, Chiranjilal has obtained a decree against me. . . . While, therefore, I request you for this help, I must admit I cannot bring myself to believe that you are not in a position to come to my aid. If, however, you are unable to appreciate my difficulties, it is a different matter.”

Such then being the state of affairs and such being the attitude of newspapers and journals as also of booksellers, Premchand rightly felt that it was a time of great test for writers. In fact, he admitted that it was no longer possible for him to continue writing. “Months pass before I am able to do any writing.” His novel *Godan*, too, was interrupted. He felt he had come to the end of the tether and must get out of this situation. He was prepared for any reasonable proposition.

When a “certain gentleman” approached him with a proposal for publication business, Premchand agreed to join him. There were many others also who agreed to join him and buy the shares.

But the gentleman disappeared from the scene. Premchand also drew up a scheme for translations and discussed it with R. C. Tandon. It did not get far.

The only way open to him was perhaps to close down either one or both the journals. He wished to stop the publication of *Jagaran*. As such a course was likely to bring discredit and make him lose face, he waited and waited—for something to turn up. Socialist leader, Sampurnanand, it seems, offered to take over *Jagaran* and convert it into a socialist bi-weekly. Within a week of the offer, it appears, Sampurnanand's supporters backed out, and Premchand had to come out with the next issue of the weekly, which had been held up pending negotiations.

To ensure that the losses did not keep on mounting, Premchand decided to reduce the number of pages of *Jagaran*. The idea underlying this cut was to save on *Jagaran* and spend more on *Hans* which, of the two journals, showed promise.

Before Premchand could increase the size of *Hans* and its subscription, he felt it necessary to put the journal on a sound footing. To enlist the sympathy of his readers and to attract new subscribers, he thought that for at least six months the journal must keep to its scheduled date of publication. (The October-November 1933 issue had not come out till the 10th of December and this was nothing unusual.) Only then, he felt, could he muster courage to enlarge the journal's size and to advertise to attract more subscribers through repeat notices.

It was, anyway, clear that Premchand could not continue with both the journals. In fact, even the closure of one did not solve the problem. "I fear losses and have little strength to bear them. Even if *Jagaran* is abandoned, *Hans* is there." And, of course, there was the printing press which was at the root of all trouble and which constituted "the greatest of all the mistakes of my life."

Premchand negotiated with the Leader Press to take over his journals and his publications. The Leader Press, however, turned down his first set of proposals. He offered alternative ones under which the Leader Press was to assess the goodwill of *Hans* and assess the value of the stocks of books and give Premchand shares in the Leader Press, in exchange for his indicated assets.

"I have spent Rs. 4,000 on *Hans*," Jainendra Kumar was informed, "but asked for Rs. 2,000 only. Even though I felt that

*Jagaran* could become a good socialist journal, I have left it to the Leader Press to continue or to discontinue it. The value of the stock of books was to be assessed on the basis of the net expenditure incurred. It was also for the Leader Press to decide whether to keep the press at Banaras or to shift it elsewhere; if it remained in Banaras, it was to be in the hands of people who, unlike myself and yourself, are not mere dreamers, i.e. those who have business acumen."

If the negotiations fructified, Premchand thought, he would ask the Leader Press to appoint Jainendra Kumar as the editor of *Hans*, so that he could get an opportunity to give a concrete shape to his ideas and *Hans* could come out in a better form. As for himself, Premchand wanted to return to his seclusion, to continue writing which, owing to the difficulties of his business, had come to an end.

Premchand was hopeful that the negotiations would materialise and that the Leader Press would bring out the next issue. The April issue of *Hans* was, therefore, not sent to the press.

The Leader Press took time in examining the proposal and came to the conclusion that Hindi publications work was not very profitable, and that they should not expand their work in Hindi. The negotiations, therefore, broke down.

He heard from them on April 24, and there was naturally a rush to send material to the press for the April-May joint issue.

Jainendra Kumar, in the meantime, continued to press on with his proposals to increase the subscription rates of *Hans*. He also offered to join, along with some others (Agyeya and Krishan Chander) so as to form a limited company "If we four could join hands, it would be wonderful," wrote Premchand. "Banaras offers certain facilities. People in this city are co-operative. There is also a set of customers familiar with the press. Seeing that more money is being invested, more of local people may also be willing to join the venture. I am willing, therefore, to cooperate with you in every way."

And a week later: "If you and Vatsyayan (Agyeya)—and Rs. 5,000—could come into the business, things would certainly improve. . . . All that I want is that what had been started should not be closed down. Rather, its utility should increase and it become an institution. More important than your coming here and spending money on journey unnecessarily, is the fact that the

terms should be put down in black and white. You can take it that, from my side, there would be little hitch. The press, as you know, is a running concern. If the circulation of the journals goes up and they yield better results, the press could even handle work from outside and may even need expansion. If the print order of *Hans* goes upto 2,000 and *Jagaran's* to 4,000 the press need not depend upon outside job work. In addition, it could print 50 to 60 formes of my books every year. If it were electrified, it could handle a much greater volume of work. . . . What we need is a Private Ltd. concern. Each one of us could do one's own assigned job according to his circumstances. Please come then and join—after, of course, the terms have been settled.” The fluid situation continued.

One evening, Sudarshan tells us, he found Premchand engaged in writing in his Banaras house. It was lighting time and writing was obviously a strain.

“This is an injustice to yourself, as well as to others,” said Sudarshan. “Your health is not good. What you badly need is a change from here.”

“But you need money to go out,” said Premchand. “And I have none.”

“You ought not to work so hard.”

“If the labourer does not work, how would he be able to feed himself?”

“Your two journals are losing. Why don't you close them down?”

“They are a part of me. I am attached to them. Also, I must work to live and feed myself.”

“But why should you alone suffer so much?”

“Suffering it is, if one feels the pinch of it. I like it immensely. And if one likes it, it is a pleasure.” He added: “To earn money is not the goal of life. To uplift human beings, to elevate man, to infuse ideals in him, is *also* our duty. If this were not so, would there be a difference between man and the beast? And if God has given one the power to write and influence others, his duty is all the more.”

Premchand, however, still continued to toy with the idea of closing down *Jagaran*. Hints to this effect had been thrown in the journal's editorials. When the journal's founder, Vinod Shankar Vyas, came to know of this, he reminded Premchand that



he had transferred the journal to Premchand on the condition that, whenever the latter wanted to discontinue it, Vyas should have the first option to take it back. Premchand seems to have pointed out that he had incurred losses totalling Rs. 4,000 on the journal and that, if Vyas intended to take it back, he should pay Rs. 4,000, either in lump sum or in instalments, and interest. Vyas was not prepared for this and insisted on the initial terms of transfer to Premchand. At this point, Premchand said he was not "closing down the journal," but simply "suspending its publication for the time being," so that it appears again with great vigour and in a more attractive form. "When that day will come we cannot say."

*Jagaran's* readers and its friends appealed to Premchand not to close it down, or even to suspend its publication even for a week, no matter what cost it entailed.

Luckily, then, just about this time came his way a proposition under which Shri Sampurnanand agreed to bear the entire responsibility for the editorial work. The issue, dated June 4, 1934, was edited by Sampurnanand with the assistance of Acharya Narendra Deva. The journal, which claimed to be a "socialist paper," continued to be printed at the Saraswati Press. His close connection with *Jagaran* thus continued. In fact, he was destined to foot the bill from out of his earnings from writing scenarios for the Ajanta Cinetone for which he went to Bombay in June 1934.

When, seven weeks later, on July 23, 1934, Premchand returned to Banaras to fetch his family, an important decision awaited him in regard to the closing down of *Jagaran*—i.e. after 13 issues had been brought out with Shri Sampurnanand as editor. Premchand decided to continue it.

The first issue of the journal's third year (September 1934) synchronised with a strike in the Saraswati Press owing largely, we are told, to the tyranny of the manager. In a two-and-a-half column statement in *Bharat*, Allahabad, Premchand explained the circumstances in which he, as the proprietor of *Jagaran*, had to take a decision. Debts on account of the journal, he said, had totalled Rs. 4,000. These included paper and printing bills besides the wages of the labour. "If the workers, for whose employment I have kept *Jagaran* going on till now, do not care for the journal to live, why should I alone bear the burden?"

The closure of *Jagaran* was a "good riddance." But the closure naturally was not the end of the difficulties. *Hans* too posed problems, and so did the Saraswati Press. Premchand kept negotiating or thinking of alternate proposals. A little later, we find him telling Jaipendra Kumar that "the press, as you know, is incurring losses. The wage bill for the last month has not been cleared yet. The June salary bill was paid in August. We have promised to pay the July and August salary bill in October, i.e. when the VPPs will be dispatched. And it was in this situation that the workers, with the support of the labour union, struck work. The wage bill totals Rs. 1,000. In addition, there is also the paper merchants' bills for Rs. 2,000. These considerations account for my proposal for selling *Hans* and the stock of books, in order to pay off the arrears and be rid of the press.

"I wrote to two or three parties, including Rishabhchandra, in this regard. They were all willing to take over *Hans*. In the meantime, the workers were paid their wages for a month and they called off the strike. They have agreed to be paid the arrears in November. I have also paid the paper merchants a little sum of money. *Jagaran* having been closed, I hope the affairs will now run smoothly. The October issue of *Hans* is getting ready. 450 VPPs will be despatched. If 300 are accepted, I shall be satisfied, and be in a position to pay a part of the paper merchants' bills. I have incurred a loss of Rs. 4,000 on *Jagaran* in addition to the labour put in. . . . It is my desire to set *Hans* in order within this year. Later on I'll increase the subscription fee to Rs. 6 per annum. Before, however, I do so, it is necessary to improve *Hans* and bring it out in time at least for a year. If there were even 1,000 subscribers, I'll be contented."

To this period also belongs Premchand's third—and the last—drama entitled *Prem ki Bedi*. More like a one-act play, it exposes the stupidity of the differences which divide people of different religions. Herein we meet Miss Jenny Gardner whose character is cast in the mould of *Rangabhoomi's* Sophia. Three years after her father's death, her mother, Mrs. Gardner, asks her to marry William, a simple-hearted, naive and rather uncouth son of a railway guard. Mrs. Gardner likes him and eggs him on to propose to Jenny. But Jenny, who is assertive, has only contempt for William. She hates hypocrisy, is a free thinker and is not made—so she thinks—to kowtow to any man who becomes

her husband. She is, however, attracted to Yograj, the husband of her recently-married friend and class-fellow Uma. Yograj is devoted to Uma who, owing to two miscarriages and one additional conception within the course of one year, gets TB and is taken to a sanatorium where she dies.

Meanwhile, Jenny goes to Uma's convalescence home and consoles Yograj who suddenly sees the image of Uma in Jenny and, in fact, proposes to her. But Jenny is not willing because although she knows that religion ought not to be dragged into such matters as marriage, she feels that Yograj's religion, Hinduism, might be a bar in the way of their marriage. An inter-communal marriage, she says, would bring him ignominy, and she, who loves him deeply, ought to be the last person to get him a bad name. She is reminded of the end of Tolstoy's Anna Karenina. After a three-month stay with Yograj, she, now earning about a thousand rupees a month, returns home where William, jilted by Jenny, has in the meantime proposed to Mrs. Gardner and married her. Jenny who has little to worry about her mother now, feels that she has been unfair to Yograj. Yograj is unable to stand the strain of separation and dies with Jenny's name on his lips. She now curses herself and decides to sacrifice all the shibboleths and unnecessary conventions at the altar of love. The ways of wealth, knowledge and nationalism, she says, can lead to strife. But the way of God is love "and that's what I have accepted."

*Prem ki Bedi* was advertised in *Hans*. Despite repeated advertisements for several months "hardly ten orders" were received. The book market was slack in the extreme. Short stories did not sell. The books that sold readily were either textbooks or books for children,\* or on subjects of interest to adults like how to rear a family or how to carve out a career. "Scores of my stories lie awaiting publication in a collection. But I haven't the courage to publish them."

His domestic life also had the usual problems. His daughter, who had delivered a child, got post-natal fever and he and his wife had to rush to Sagar where she lived. While Shivrani Devi stayed on, Premchand returned. The arrangements for food

\*He had by now himself written and published *Ek Kutte ki Kahani* and *Jangal Ki Kahanian* for children.

at Banaras were unsatisfactory and Premchand suffered from dysentery.

Premchand was now engaged in translating *Karmabhoomi* and his stories into Urdu. His output of stories declined.

## Author and His Stories

OWING TO THE stresses and strains under which Premchand worked all his life, his output of short stories was never very large. In fact, he has himself told us that at times several months would pass before he could write one, and that his average output was never more than two stories a month.

The writing of a short story, according to him, was a pretty exacting affair.\* A mere event could never constitute a story; nor, for that matter, could a character or a group of characters. To be successful, the story must be based on some psychological, emotional or philosophical truth. If it were there, the nature of the event around which a story was to be built was immaterial. Without this psychological basis, however, Premchand could never get down to writing a short story.

Another important ingredient of the short story was the element of drama. Premchand himself laboured hard to inject this element of drama and to create a climax which he considered an "absolute necessity." This, however, was the second stage, the first being the psychological truth underlying the themes. Once the former was decided upon, he got down to a delineation of the characters which would fit in with the theme and, in fact, worked out the whole story in his mind—even the sections that it must be divided into—so that it could gradually move on to a climax. A gripping narration or a racy language which by itself could not make a story successful, constituted its "soul." An attempt had, therefore, to be made by exerting one's mind to introduce the poetic element or literary flavour into it. This required a bent of mind which, without any conscious effort, could create plots, inject the dramatic element, and make the composition a literary piece.

After a short story was completed, Premchand would read it over to see if it had some originality, some touch of realism and some power to move—the tests of the success of a short story.

\*Letter to Editor, *Nairang-e-Khayal*, Lahore, 1934.

The acceptance or otherwise of a story for publication was no proof of its success. His experience had shown that both successful and unsuccessful stories got into print. "Indeed, very often I find that a story which I considered a failure was greatly appreciated by friends and readers."

Premchand has told us how an event some time can suggest the possibility of a story. During his study of the history of Islam, he read of the marriage of Timur—who had massacred thousands of Turks in Constantinople—to a Turkish woman, otherwise known as Ummatul Habib. How to inject the element of drama into the event? That was the problem. The fact that Hamida Begum, during her childhood, had learnt the art of war from her father and had in fact taken part in a battle, seemed to suggest the possible line of approach. By playing a ruse, they could be brought face to face. But Timur was not handsome. How could a Turkish woman fall for an ugly man who had massacred the populace of Constantinople? Premchand brought this about by introducing certain noble qualities in the character of Timur so that Hamida could be attracted to him.

This, then, is how he conceived his story *Dil ki Rani*, published first in *Chand* of November 1933, in which the massacre in Constantinople by the forces of Timur is stopped at the instance of the "son" of the commander-in-chief. Timur is so deeply moved by the words of wisdom uttered by this young "man"—in reality Ummatul Habib, the only daughter of the commander-in-chief—that he appoints "him" the *vizier* and his chief adviser. The "son" avoids coming too close to Timur, lest the secret of "his" sex should be out. The young "man," sent to conquer a new area inhabited by the Armenian Christians, is responsible for liberalism which is misunderstood by others and reported to Timur. But Timur refuses to be misled and joins "him." In the end, Timur proposes to the young "man" who is surprised that the conqueror had all the time known that the young "man" was in fact a woman in man's garb. And it was this "man" that became Timur's beloved wife, Hamida.

Another story, *Qaidi*, written about this time, is taken from Russian history. It is built round the life of a Russian revolutionary who, with the help of his wife, attempts to murder the newly-appointed cruel governor of the Ukraine. The wife has in fact enticed the governor into a park where the husband, in hiding,

fires at him. The attempt fails and the assailant is sentenced to fourteen years' imprisonment. There, within the jail, he is furious at his wife having let him down for the simple reason that the governor had now befriended her. When, therefore, he is released, he goes home with the intention of killing her. On arrival at the house of the governor, however, he finds that his wife is dead and her bier ready to be taken to the graveyard. Told that her last wish was that her husband, Imanoff, be asked to pardon her, he embraces the dead body and helps transport the bier.

How he conceived the plots and wove out his stories is shown by a comparison of the first draft of a story entitled *Damul ka Qaidi*, with its published version in *Hans* of October 1932, and its Urdu version in *Shahkar* in November 1935. A synopsis in English, in Premchand's own hand of this or a similar story, is also suggestive of how he developed them.

Here is the synopsis: "Seth ji in a village—bridge construction. He kills an young boy to get the bridge pillar erected. He is caught and sentenced for life. He returns after 14 years and moves towards his home. He finds the same boy as his son. He is awestruck. His whole fortune has been ruined. His wife and child are living in obscurity and misery. Seth goes in quest of parents of the boy. They are nowhere to be found. He comes to know that they are in Ahmedabad. He goes and finds that his own house is occupied by the. . . . He is building a bridge. His son is caught and killed in a bridge construction. This turns him a wise man. He bows before the lord with a true heart. He turns a new leaf of life. All desires vanish. He is no more a heretic."

This synopsis is scored out by Premchand himself who writes it out once again. This is how the revised synopsis reads: "Seth ji returns in high spirits. A big construction has been given to him. He departs to his work the same day. The pillars refuse to rise. A sacrifice is necessary. A young boy is caught secretly and sacrificed. The seth is caught and sentenced for 14 years. He returns to find his house in the possession of others. After a long search he goes to the same bridge. It is being constructed. His wife recognises him. She has a son. The seth is awestruck. It is the same boy whom he had sacrificed. What a change in the fortune. He now labours with his wife but is afraid of the

son. One day he finds his own son sacrificed in the construction. His wife already dead. His only source of life dried."

The story, as originally conceived, opens with the person of Seth Khubchand who, thanks to the favours of the officials, is rich. His only regret is that he does not have a son. About this time there is the announcement of a reduction in the wages of the mill workers. The workers, under the leadership of Gopi, stage a strike. In the excitement, the seth shoots down Gopi. Before dying, the latter makes the crowd promise that it would not do any harm to the person of the seth. Gopi's noble act converts the seth from an atheist into a believer. While returning home that day, the seth is taken by a friend to the house of a prostitute. In the beauty of the prostitute, the seth now sees the hand of God. He loses himself in works of public good and is changed from an exploiter into a servant of the people. The seth's transformation brings about a change in the prostitute. He is also blessed with a son whom he takes to the temple where he meets the prostitute who has given up her ignoble profession. The story ends with the prostitute's words: "So long as I live, I shall be eternally grateful to you."

In the story, as published in Hindi, the first two sections are the same as in the original. The seth's departure from the scene of the killing of Gopi is followed by a threatening mass procession which marches to the seth's house. The seth, who has been moved by Gopi's kind act which saved his life, surrenders himself, confesses his guilt and is sentenced to fourteen years of imprisonment and sent to the Andamans (Damul). During his exile, the seth's wife delivers a son who has an intriguingly striking resemblance with Gopi. When the seth returns, he finds his wife and his son, Krishanchandra, living in obscurity. Krishanchandra, now an adult, has the good of the labourers at heart. He is attached to the children and widow of Gopi, whom he visits. Within a few days of the return of the seth, there is again a strike in the mill. The turn to be shot this time is that of Krishanchandra. His mother dies of the shock. The seth, however, has resigned himself to all this. For, he sees in this the hand of God and feels happy that his son died for the labourers' cause. The story ends with worship in a temple built in Krishanchandra's memory.

The published version is thus so different from the original that after the first two sections, one could as well term it to be a



different story. The Urdu version of the story, incidentally, is much shorter. It has only six sections as against the ten in the Hindi published version. While some of the sections have been shortened, others have been deleted completely. The story ends with the death of the seth's wife and the seth's devotion to the cause of labour welfare.

While the stories given above give an idea of the hard work involved in conceiving, writing or rewriting the stories, the same would not be true of the large number of stories—some of them in the first person singular—in which he drew heavily on his personal experiences, especially of his days of childhood. These stories—and we have already referred to some—required a sitting or two and no more. They were autobiographical. Some of the personal experiences, narrated in the autobiographical essay *Jeevansar*, are found in a story entitled *Holi ki Chhutti*, in which the author also preaches pacifism through the mouth of an ex-soldier who had fought in World War I. The ex-soldier ascribes all wars to the greed and lust of capitalist countries and has turned over a new chapter in his life by devoting his time to affording protection to villagers from the ravages of wild animals.

While his *Meri Pahli Rachana*, from which we have quoted in one of the earlier chapters, shows how he composed his first piece satirising the "romance" of a "distant uncle" with a *chammarin*, *Gulli Danda* reflects the nostalgic feelings with which he looked back to the days when he played this game with zest in the village. A glimpse of the other hobby indulged in by Premchand in his younger days, kite-flying, is had in another story entitled *Bade Bhai Sahib*. Incidents from the latter years of Premchand's life also find an echo in such stories as *Lottery*, already quoted, *Muft ka Yash* which is a satire on the system where the administrative machinery plays a very important part in the life of the community and where chance meetings with officials are cashed in by the clever ones, or in *Balak* wherein a low-paid employee is so noble that he gladly accepts his wife along with her child by another man because, he says, "if the seed for a crop is supplied by the moneylender, do we, on that account, abandon the crop?"

*Gila* is a veiled pen-portrait of Premchand himself, as seen through the eyes of his wife. Several incidents in Premchand's life, e.g. the marriage of his daughter and his insistence on not

performing the *kanyadan*, the undependability of his friends and his misplaced generosity, are all brought out in this story as well as in Shivrani Devi's book on her husband. *Paipooji*, written a little later, echoes the author's disgust at the haughty attitude of members of a Hindu bridegroom's party and the humiliations to which the bride's people are subjected to, in particular the demeaning ceremony when the bride's father and her other relations wash and worship the bridegroom's feet.

The principal character of *Daporshankh* again is a veiled portrait of Premchand. The character of Shyama is modelled after Mrs. Premchand. To give the story a form and a content, Premchand introduces another character, the narrator, to whom Daporshankh (as also the latter's wife) narrates how they are duped by an extremely clever and suave young man whose faked interest in literature and the made-up stories of the stepmother's tyrannies move Daporshankh so deeply that he allows himself and his friend to be duped by the young man. For the correct version of what happened, one must refer to the account given by Mrs. Premchand in her work. A total stranger, she says, once wrote to Premchand that he would be able to secure a job carrying a salary of one hundred rupees only if he could deposit a security of an equal amount: "I haven't got this amount, and I shall be grateful if you could lend me this amount to be paid back."

"If we could help this man in difficulty, it would enable him to stand on his own feet," said Premchand to his wife. "He would pay back in two or three instalments."

The money was sent, and Premchand wrote to him that the money was being given by Mrs. Premchand and should be returned to her. Four days later, the person concerned wrote back to thank Premchand and told him that he had got the job. A few months later he took "leave" from his office and called on Premchand to "pay his respects." He also told Premchand that his mother was dead, and that his father had taken a second wife who did not like him. He would, therefore, like to become a member of Premchand's family! He stayed with the author's family for three days and had to be moved to a hotel afterwards. At the end of twelve days, he had gone and it was left to Premchand, who had introduced him to the hotel management, to pay the bill. This "gentleman" again visited the author

about the time of his daughter's wedding and stayed with the family for a fortnight. While leaving, he again borrowed fifty rupees. A couple of months later, he again visited Premchand at Lucknow, while Mrs. Premchand was away at Banaras, and informed the author that he was getting married into a family at Patna. Against promises of paying back, he borrowed another hundred rupees. This was not all. He not only made the author give presents but also placed various orders with Premchand's goldsmith and draper without his knowledge. The bride too came to Premchand's house in Lucknow.

Three days later, police visited Premchand's house in search of the person who turned out to be none other than a proclaimed offender! Premchand had to tell him to leave his house and later on to pay the bills of the goldsmith and the draper. It took him a year and a half to pay off these outstandings secretly. Mrs. Premchand came to know of the entire transaction from Jainendra Kumar after Premchand's death.

Another instance of Premchand being duped is found in an earlier short story *Aap Beeti* wherein a young man, again a stranger who evinced interest in literature, parked himself on Premchand who was then in Kanpur, and cheated him. And he has delineated this young man's character in a way so as to lead to distrust in anybody and everybody. In fact, the narrator turns a deaf ear to the genuine request of a low-paid worker in the press—ultimately to find that the simple-hearted folk of the village are far more honest than the well-dressed ones. This realisation makes the narrator feel so hurt that he writes an article in a journal exposing the hypocrisy of the cheats who pass off as seekers of truth and servants of literature. The result, as brought out in the story *Aap Beeti*, is that the stranger sends the money back, with a slip tendering his apology.

*Demonstration* shows the sad predicament of the dramatists who are exploited by commercialised managers of theatrical companies. The poor dramatist—Premchand himself had tried his hands at drama—has to think of various stratagems, ultimately to be defeated by the managers.

*Chamatkar* is the story of a change of heart. A private tutor to a rich man's only son has the kind employer's full trust and confidence. When his ward's marriage is fixed, the tutor is put in complete charge of the arrangements, including the purchase

of ornaments. Taking advantage of this implicit faith the tutor steals a box of ornaments, hides it in his own trunk, wishing gradually to give the ornaments to his wife. The latter, however, is deeply pained when she gets the scent. Some time afterwards when the tutor is offered a post in a bank and has to provide a surety for a large amount which his kind employer willingly provides, his heart is touched. He so manoeuvres matters that he is able to quietly replace the stolen box of ornaments. Hearing this, the wife is very happy.

*Kusum* exposes the evil of dowry. The husband of a young girl is callous and indifferent to her and does not fetch her from her parents' home. There is speculation over his attitude. She writes to him, but there is no reply. A friend comes into the picture, meets the boy and finds out that he is annoyed because he expected the father-in-law to meet the entire expense of his education abroad. The friend conveys this, and the girl's father is agreeable to send an amount as the first instalment but the girl stops the father from doing so. Her sense of self-respect is aroused, and she is not only not resigned to fate, but feels happy at her sense of pride.

*Kayar* is the story of an unsuccessful romance of two class-fellows, a Brahmin boy and a *Bania* girl. The boy tells her that she must marry him and that, otherwise, he would commit suicide. The girl asks her parents for their approval. Even though the girl's father agrees that his daughter marry the Brahmin boy in preference to the ICS boy that he had fixed up, the boy's father is furious. The latter is surprised at the courage of the seth, the girl's father, to come forward with the proposal, and takes his son to task. Such a proposal, to him, was unthinkable. The girl writes to the boy asking him the next step to be taken, but the boy shrinks from his commitment and does not even reply to the letter from the girl he had promised to marry. The girl is deeply pained and commits suicide.

*Neyur* shows how a poor, hardworking but henpecked peasant is duped by a *sadhu* who persuades him to bring all the silver he and his wife have and also some borrowed rupees with a promise to turn them into gold, and then disappears with everything. The poor peasant, fearing rebukes from his wife and his creditors, disappears and himself becomes a *sadhu*. He attempts to repeat the fraud on a young widow, but suddenly withdraws. In fact, he

is so disgusted that he returns home to find that his dear wife is no more. He again loses himself in hard work.

*Jadu*, a filler, is in the form of a dialogue between two sisters; there is little substance.

*Doodh ka Dam* shows the plight of the Harijans. A Harijan woman, who is the village midwife, feeds the infant son of a rich seth and is properly looked after. The priestly class, Motayram, etc., protests and the Harijan woman, who has brought up her own child on cow's milk, has to leave. Her husband dies of plague and she is bitten by a snake. Her son, just eight, and the only survivor in the family, sleeps in the open and lives on crumbs. One day the seth's son coerces him into playing with him and others of the higher caste boys and later complains to the mother that the Harijan boy has defiled him. The Harijan boy is told to leave the house and get out of their sight. With his only companion, a dog, with whom he feels one, he goes to the debris of his father's house and tries to sleep there. But he is hungry. His hunger draws him surreptitiously at night to the house of the seth to get the crumbs. "It is difficult to repay the debt of feeding a child, they say, and this is what I get."

*Basi Bhat men Khuda ka Sajha* is the psychological study of a clerk who feels obliged to his employer who has given him a job after a long period of unemployment. The employer, subsequently, promises him a promotion and asks him to forge the accounts so that he could escape high taxes. The clerk does as he is told, but his conscience is gnawing. He loses faith in God and when his wife tells him that he had recovered from a serious illness owing to her prayers and owing to the promise to feed the Brahmins, the clerk says he has no faith in God and, therefore, in the priests as well!

*Manovritti* shows the different points of view of two young men, two old men and a young woman and an old woman on seeing a pretty girl fast asleep on a bench in a public park. "Is she a prostitute?" or "is she one of the forward types?" Those who are commenting upon her are none other than her would-be husband and father-in-law!

*Riyasat ka Diwan* is on the lines of *Raj Hat* and *kavach*, with the injection of a little of political thoughts that moved the elite. Mahashe Mehta, the Diwan of a princely State, has been

told to leave no stones unturned in looking after the comforts of the British Resident who is due to visit the State. The Diwan's son, who is well known to the prince and with whom he plays tennis, is a man of new light. He is opposed to illegal exactions being levied by his father to meet the expenditure on the visit of the British Resident. There is some argument between the son and the prince and the former is turned out of the palace and the State. The Diwan's wife, who appeals to the prince and his wife and gets a rebuff from the prince, has also to leave the State. The Diwan, keen to hold on to the job, however, stays on and is complimented by the prince for the excellent arrangements made for the visit of the British Resident. The prince flatters him. Later, he asks him to kidnap the daughter of a moneylender, who had caught his attention. (The prince does not mind if she is married, and is prepared to pay the fine and also leave his wife who is "sickly.") When the Diwan shows his unwillingness to carry out the prince's orders he is sacked and has to leave the State.

*Idgah* is a moving story of a poor child who goes along with his school-fellows to the Idgah. Unlike others, he does not have more than three pice to spend. His grandmother, the only one who looks after him, is too poor and has only another five pice with her to give sweets to those who would be calling on her on this day of the Id. The child goes to the Idgah, feels tempted to buy sweets and is made a fun of by his friends. But he does not buy these. He buys a pair of tongs, so that his granny's hands are not burnt while she cooks food. He goes back home hungry but with a pair of tongs. The granny is touched by his devotion. She blesses him.

*Rasik Sampadak* shows how a widower editor goes out of the way to publish inferior writings of women poets, and lands himself into a ridiculous situation when he is being chased by one of his admirers.

*Beton val: Vidhva* is the story of a widow whose husband's legacy — of twenty thousand rupees in cash, a house and her ornaments — is divided on one pretext or another by her four sons (and their wives) among themselves. The sons talk of the law that does not recognise the wife's existence for the purposes of inheritance. They conspire against her and call off the sister's marriage to one who has demanded five thousand rupees as dowry, and marry her to

an elderly man who is double her age. The mother, reduced to the position of a maidservant in her own house, is so unhappy that she drowns herself.

*Swamin* is the story of two sisters married to two brothers. When the elder one dies, his father, a widower, hands over the charge of the household to the elder daughter-in-law. After the father's death, a few years later, the younger son feels that he should go out and earn money. His wife and children also go with him, leaving behind the lonely figure of a widow who bears the burden of farming, etc. The farm help who during the life of the father, was a lousy lot, now works harder than ever. He realises that the supervision is very little and that he is being trusted. His work impresses the widow and she asks him to get married to her!

*Jhanki* is a story portraying the life of a middle class family—the interminable arguments between the mother-in-law and sister-in-law and the activities of the menfolk attending to religious or other festivities or concerts.

*Jyoti* portrays the life of a stern-hearted and frustrated widow who is jealous of the happiness of other women. When her elder son is attracted to a young maiden in the village and gives her small presents, the mother asserts her authority and warns the son against associating with the girl who, she thinks, is showy and not one who would do the domestic chores. A chance meeting with her, however, convinces her that she is a type who would suit her son. She now asks the son to get ready for marriage to the same girl.

*Lekhak* is the pen-portrait of a poet who burns midnight oil to compose poems and yet starves. He is under debt and is ill-clad. When invited by a socially important person, he feels happy that a poet is being honoured. Later, however, he discovers that all that they expect of him is sycophancy and poems in praise of a guest of his host. He is disillusioned, but returns home a happy man for he has not cheapened art.

*Akhiri Heela*, in a lighter vein, shows how a husband, who does not wish to fetch his wife from her village to the town where he works, puts all sorts of excuses, plausible and otherwise, to postpone the day—for instance, the arduous life of a journalist, the unsuitability of the house, the undependability and the burden of a stream of visiting friends, the fear of burglars, the unhygienic

conditions of the town and the sudden and unwarranted appearance of some undesirable women in the house—naturally to make the wife appear on the scene.

*Do Bailon ki Katha* is a delightful story of a pair of bullocks who are attached to each other and to the master who loves them. The bullocks resent being sent to the house of the brother-in-law of the master, for he is cruel and exacts heavy work and starves them. The bullocks decamp and return to the master, again to be taken away. They again decamp, get into a scuffle with a bull and are taken to the cattle pound. Here, too, they break through the wall and let other animals free. They, however, cannot escape. While one of them is so tightly tied that he cannot be released, the other one says that they must go through it together. The bullocks are then auctioned and the person who purchases them is the village butcher. When he takes them past the village where lives their master, the bullocks are delighted. They know the area, and make a bid for liberation to the master's house. The entire village acclaims them. The butcher, who wishes to take them away, claims ownership. So does the real master. The matter is finally decided by the bullocks themselves. They chase the butcher away and drive him out of the village!

*Kutsq* criticises those public workers who enjoyed themselves on public money, drank and went about in cars. This sort of criticism is repeated by a child who accompanies its mother, a volunteer. The narrator tells the child that what it has heard is all lies. This he says because he does not wish the child's mind to be polluted. A lie told with this object is better than even truth.

*Griha Niti* highlights the differences between a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law and the discreet and subtle handling by the husband to bring about a rapprochement by telling the mother that she has no right to expect what she does from her daughter-in-law, that her rights are only by virtue of being the mother of the husband. On the other hand, he portrays to his wife the mother's attitude in different and sympathetic colours. Lies told for a good cause prove effective, and the wife does exactly what the mother-in-law has been expecting of her.

*Miss Padma* is the story of two sisters. The elder one, who is married, is unhappy in life and advises her sister to ensure happi-



ness by becoming economically independent. The latter takes a law degree, sets up practice and is successful. She fights the case for her sister's separation from her husband. In due course, however, she finds that money and professional success are not everything. She pines for love. The irony is that she falls for the man whom she had separated from her sister. The man is dominant and puts her to a severe test—by getting away with all her savings while she is in labour. When she leaves confinement, she is furious with the husband. But he says that the person whom he has really loved is not the lawyer, but her divorced sister who has been a devoted wife even after separation.

*Veshya* portrays the life of one who, on his father's death, becomes a drunkard, ignores his wife and is in the clutches of a prostitute. A friend whom he has helped in the early years returns home and feels distressed when he is told of the friend's bad ways. He wants to get the friend out of the sad predicament and starts visiting the same prostitute. The latter falls in love with him, and wishes to settle down with him, but he tells her that the real intention that brought him to her was to save his friend and restore the happiness of his friend's wife. She is disgusted and disappears. The friend, however, is saved, and there is a reunion of the husband and wife. But the man is left alone for he finds that the prostitute has committed suicide.

*Khudai Fojdar* is the story of the "people's police" who rob the rich to help the poor. They send anonymous letters to a rich moneylender, asking him to pay up. One day, when he is conferring with his wife about seeking police protection for his amassed wealth, beginning with three rupees ten years earlier to lakhs now, come the "people's police" in the garb of a regular police force, remove his valuables, and leave him stranded with three rupees, his original capital.

*Roshni* is the confession of an ICS officer about the superficiality of official life. Caught up in a blinding dust storm and frightened, he sees a widow rushing to the nearby village to arrange shelter for her child. She is not afraid of anything, be it the storm or the wild animals prowling about. She tells him the way to his destination and when, after the storm is over, she sees him passing through the village, she makes anxious enquiries. The officer is sympathetic and offers her a five-rupee note which she refuses because she does not like charity and must be true to

the memory of her husband. He is touched at the courage and sympathy of the rustic, which contrasts with the hypocrisy of the so-called civilised. He realises the hypocrisy of the educated classes and is now an enlightened man who goes to save the life of a blind man (which he would not have done a day earlier!).

*Gham Nadari Baz Bukhar*, a story in lighter vein, shows the predicament of a low-paid employee who, in his anxiety to secure pure milk, shares the maintenance expenses of a cow and subsequently buys a goat. Being a white-collar employee, he finds it difficult to take care of the goat and is involved in various situations which finally force him to part with the animal gladly.

*Swang*, also in lighter vein, shows how an urbanised and effeminate Rajput, married to the daughter of a big Rajput zamindar, has to pose that he is brave. While he is afraid of *shikar*, he stops on the way gazing at the beautiful blossoming trees. On other occasions too, he is able to find some very plausible excuses. He is nearly, but not actually, caught when his wife's (female) friends put on masks of dacoits, raid the house and take away his wife. The youth is a mute witness. (But, of course, he later claims that he knew that it was a ruse!)

*Baraat* is a moving story of the degree to which a humiliated woman can go. The enlightened wife of a conservative husband finds it hard to pull on. She leaves his house to go back to her parents. After fifteen years of this unhappy married life, the husband decides to marry again. Just when the wedding party is about to leave, the first wife appears on the scene and stops the bridegroom's car. There are the usual arguments. The husband, who is foiled, knocks her down and she dies on the spot. The mob, now in a frenzy, beats him to death, and the two are taken to the burning ghat followed by a crowd of people, a "new wedding party."

(It is surprising that, as in the case of *Qatil ki Maan*, or *Hatiara*, the story entitled *Baraat* has been published under the name of Mrs. Premchand in Hindi and under the name of Premchand in Urdu!)

*Vafa ki Devi* is the result of joining the themes of *Be Gharaz Mohsin* and *Laila*. Paragraphs after paragraphs of the two stories—such as those relating to the loss of the child in the village fair and the tussle between Laila and her consort, on the one hand, and their subjects, on the other—can be interchanged.

Another story of the same name, namely *Vafa ki Devi*, is the portrait of an old Harijan lady, married at the age of five. Her husband deserts her and goes abroad and sends some money and a letter every quarter. The *thakur* of the village makes advances to her, and she snubs him. The Thakur thereupon commits suicide. The thakur's wife and child are now at the mercy of his younger brother who is callous and drives her out. The elder thakurani, who is given shelter by the Harijan woman, is furious with rage. She plans to file a suit and win the case against her brother-in-law even if she has to sell her honour. The Harijan woman who has been responsible for the suicide of the elder thakur, without anyone else knowing it, is aroused. She volunteers her services, tries her charms on the younger thakur and makes him transfer half the property to the elder thakur's widow. This done, she tells the younger thakur that the previous night her husband had appeared in a dream and stopped her from proceeding further with this "romance."

Some of these and previous stories were collected and published in Urdu in *Najaat* by Tirath Ram Harbans Lal of Lahore (subsequently the same collection was published as *Akhiri Tohfa* by Narain Dutt Sehgal and Sons, Lahore), in *Zaad-i-Rah* by Hali Publishing House of Delhi, in *Vaardaat* by Jamia Millia of Delhi, and in *Doodh ki Qimat* by Ismat Book Depot of Delhi.

While these collections were being warmly welcomed by the reading public, Premchand was also honoured at small literary gatherings. Mention may be made in passing of his presiding over a seminar on short stories at the Banaras University. The inaugural meeting, over which Madan Mohan Malaviya presided, was at 11 A.M., the second session being at 2-30 P.M. During the interval, Premchand and his wife roamed about along the little canal. Seeing the young men and women frolicking, Premchand felt unhappy. "I don't know when this slave country will get on to the right path; our youth imitate the West, and imitate it badly," he remarked. "And they take pride in it as the hallmark of scholastic achievements. They imbibe all the bad points, but seldom the good points of others. An Englishman who sits under the fan is capable of running for miles under the scorching sun. He feels happy in the midst of the gravest of dangers. But our youth run away from difficult tasks. It is this attitude, in fact, that is responsible for our enslavement."

"Of what use is this criticism at this time?" asked his wife.

"A slave country has no business to indulge in frivolities."

"Maybe, we too shall win freedom."

"Frivolity is the enemy of freedom."

"The British also love pleasures and comforts. Why are they not enslaved?"

"They enjoy their pleasures because they are a free people. Before they became free, they lived at the level of animal existence. They worked hard, very hard. In this country also freedom would never come so long as we are taken in by pleasures and comforts. You get freedom through sacrifice and hard work. . . . Our youth forget that their parents save money at the cost of their health to give them education. And they go about like princes and princesses. It is these people who would later take up the reins of government."

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## Peep into Bombay's Filmland

PREMCHAND, WHO SINCERELY believed that there was no medium more potent than the film for the propagation of ideas in a country where the masses were illiterate, must have reacted with some envy to the appointment of Sudarshan in a film company in Bombay in January 1933, on Rs. 600 a month. Within some months he was offered Rs. 750 by the Mahalakshmi Cinetone for the film rights of his *Sevasadan*; and even though he was warned that the film producers would "disgrace" his novel, his condition was so bad that he had jumped at it. As he said: "If in this grave situation I had not got this amount, God alone knows how difficult it would have been to face the problems."

Premchand's financial position had showed no improvement, and, if anything, it had further deteriorated. He was, therefore, happy when the Ajanta Cinetone of Bombay invited him to go over to Bombay and write scenarios for them. The basis of the offer was not salary, but a contract on Rs. 8,000 a year. The Cinetone sent him two telegrams. Premchand's circumstances were so straitened that either he accepted this offer, or sold his novel "in the open market." The film company did not insist on regular attendance and he thought he could write whatever he liked and write it anywhere he liked. "All that will be required of me is to produce three or four scenarios for them." After a year's work with the Ajanta Cinetone, he thought, he could arrive at an arrangement under which he could write three or four stories for them every year (from Banaras) and get about four to five thousand rupees which would help him tide over the financial difficulties of *Hans* and *Jagaran*. A week later: "My needs tell me I must go to Bombay. So does my age-long friend, Dame Poverty. This may be a new experience in life."

Premchand conferred with his wife. Her first reaction to the proposal was adverse. "Your digestion is weak," she said, "and Bombay's climate won't suit you."

"Lakhs of people live in Bombay," he said. "For me, the decision is crucial because without going there, my position here would be difficult. What I get here is just enough to keep us going. Not so *Hans* and *Jagaran* which now are part of the family."

"To go to Bombay in order to keep them alive is not advisable," she said.

"Having kept these two elephants in the house, won't you feed them? They must live. What is particularly attractive about the Bombay proposal is that the disadvantages from which novels and short stories suffer would be overcome. While only the educated read my novels and stories, the film would get them universality."

"That is hardly of much consequence to me," she said.

"I don't write primarily for the good of others. I write also for peace within. The larger the number of people who read my works, or see the films based on them, the greater the peace of mind I'll get. Equally important is the fact that I'll be able to spend more on *Hans* and *Jagaran*." He added: "Also, please remember that I have only five or six years for creative work. Afterwards, we shall go and live in the village. So long as others don't go and live among villagers, show them the way to improve their lot, the condition of our peasants would not improve. . . . Basically, of course, whatever one does, one does for the satisfaction of one's own self."

Mrs. Premchand agreed. As she had to attend two weddings at Allahabad, it was agreed that Premchand should go to Bombay alone and, after the weddings, come to fetch his wife. Decision about the children's education was to be taken after Premchand had been to Bombay.

At this time Premchand had Rs. 1,500 as fixed deposit in the bank but had taken loans against this amount. For three or four days, he worried himself to raise money to undertake the journey to Bombay, and ultimately it was Mrs. Premchand who produced Rs. 100.

"I knew you would, but I didn't ask you for it earlier, lest you should curse *Hans* and *Jagaran*."

"As if I am a stepmother to them!"

Premchand arrived in Bombay on June 1, 1934. He took up a house in Dadar and ate at a wayside hotel. During the first fort-

night we find him "still trying to understand this work, and reading books on the subject." By July 1934, he tells Jainendra Kumar: "I have already written one story (scenario). It is being sent. I am starting another one. If you have some plot in your mind, please send me the synopsis. I know several directors here. Maybe, one of them may accept it. When third-rate people get theirs accepted why shouldn't you?"

A similar suggestion was made to Daya Narain Nigam also.

In his letter dated August 11, 1934, which also narrates his tale of woe, he tells Nigam that he has sent the cheque sent by him to Raghupati Sahai Firaq. "I hope he'll be satisfied. And I shall send the dues of Niranjnlal from here in instalments." He adds: "The fact is that I was never cut for business. You too are no businessman. But I did not learn a lesson from you, and I don't know how I got this obsession that where you had failed I would succeed. This wretched *Hans* has resulted in a loss of four to five thousand. On top of this, I was obsessed with the idea of a weekly which I started. I have suffered a loss of three thousand on this one too.

"My object was to start something which could yield a little steady income, so that I could sit in my ivory tower to devote myself to literature. But it was like an honoured guest visiting the house and taking away whatever he could. Neither of the journals has been a success. All my income from books and the press goes to keep them going. In addition, there is a sum of two thousand rupees to be paid on account of paper. It was because of this that I had to run down to this place. If I stay here for a year or two, I hope to be rid of the debts that I have incurred. But I don't think I am destined to stay here all that long. Socialist paper *Jagaran*, now being brought out under the editorship of Babu Sampurnanand, may, I hope, be taken over by the Socialist Party. If that be so, I would be rid of the loss of a hundred and fifty a month on the journal."

"The journals were losing heavily," he again wrote to Nigam. "Realisation of outstandings from the booksellers was difficult. The rate of printing paper was going up. Against my wishes, therefore, I had to enter into a contract under which I shall give the Cinetone six stories in a year—an output which does not appear to be difficult. I shall, of course, have to consult the film directors about the themes, because they are the best judges."

Premchand, incidentally, felt lonely in the big city. Time hung heavy. In this connection it is interesting to note that during this and his subsequent stay in Bombay, he saw only one film and this was the only one he had ever seen!

At times he felt annoyed with himself for having left the idyllic peace of Banaras. The world of Bombay was entirely different from that of Banaras.

"You are among a big crowd of people gathered for the two weddings on June 22 and 28," he wrote to his wife, "and here I am—alone. I have to pay heavily for the celebration of weddings. I don't know what to do. How much can I work? After all I am not a beast of burden. I am a human being and need some recreation. And the best recreation for me is to play with children. In fact, there is no other recreation that is satisfying. When I sit down to dine, I feel out of place. The ways here are Western and Westernism repels me. Had I been with you, I would have fondled Gianu (daughter's son) who must be talking now. The very idea of passing this month and a half without you all frightens me."

Later: "I am shifting to the house which I have rented on Rs. 50 a month. I have engaged a servant on Rs. 12 per month and food. He does all the household work."

Meanwhile, Dhunnu failed in the examination and his poor performance pained Premchand. "An event like this is not a happy one for the parents," he told his wife. "But it doesn't matter now that it has happened. Successes and failures are all a part of life. It is due to his own negligence. If, however, he is sad, please console him. I am sending herewith a letter which please hand over to him." And to the son: "Don't take your failure to heart. I had apprehended it. Sometimes a failure is more rewarding than a success. Discipline yourself, take exercise daily and study regularly—and you'll succeed."

From the very beginning, Premchand appears to have been undecided about his future association with the film industry. He advised his wife to get the boys admitted to Allahabad University. The decision for admission at Allahabad was taken because, as he wrote to his wife, "if I get them admitted in Bombay I shall be tied down to this place—and I don't wish to be tied down. I haven't yet made up my mind whether or not, and for how long, I shall stay here. If I don't continue here, there would



be the risk of dislocation of their studies. This, however, should not become an excuse for your continued stay there in Allahabad for the sake of the future of the children. Children want money above everything, and I shall continue to send them one hundred rupees every month. They should be happy and comfortable. . . . Life here without you is difficult." Not long afterwards he fetched the family.

"It is becoming difficult for me to write stories for the cinema," said Premchand in a letter to Jainendra Kumar three days after his return to Bombay. "What is needed here is stories that can be staged and be easy for the artistes. Even when a story is good, so long as suitable actors are not available for staging them, who will play the roles? I don't accept the need for miracles. My two stories submitted to them are simple stories."

Premchand's first story for the Ajanta Cinetone Company—the theme suggested by the producers—portrayed the conflict between industrial labour, on the one hand, and the employers, on the other. Here he attempted to put across his Gandhian solution of compromise between the rival interests. When he finished the script, it was found that the film directors were unfamiliar with the Devanagari script. It had, therefore, to be translated into Urdu. The directors suggested changes in the plot. Some portions were deleted and others added. The plot and the dialogues, as a result, underwent important changes. The racy dialogues, for which Premchand was known, suffered in their vigour. The selfishness, brutality and high-handedness of the industrialist, and the poverty and misery of the labourers were, however, highlighted.

The resultant film was ready when the AICC session was due to meet in Bombay. The film producers in fact wanted to show it to the delegates to the Congress session, or perhaps get it inaugurated by some VIP. But there was delay in getting the film approved by the Board of Censors which later suggested some more changes that had the effect of diluting the theme. Some of the scenes had to be reshot. And in the penultimate scene, Premchand himself was persuaded to play the role of a *panch*!

Owing to the pressure from millowners, however, the film was not certified.

In fact, it was about this time that the Mahalakshmi Cinetone's film version of *Sevasadan* was also ready. Premchand was sadly

disappointed with the product.\* "They have disgraced my book," he said. "There is very little of me in it." This was true of "Mill Mazdoor" also. To Jainendra Kumar: "I knew you won't like 'Mill Mazdoor.' I can say, it's mine, and I can also say, it is not mine. The little there is of me in it, is almost negligible. The director is all in all in the film industry. The writer may be the master of the pen but this empire is that of the director. The writer can have no say. Indeed, it is only when the writer accepts the sovereignty of the producer, that he can stay on here. He dare not say: 'I know what the public wants, and you don't know.' For the director strongly retorts: 'I know what the public wants. And we are not here to reform the public's tastes. We have started it as an industry, and we shall give the public what it wants!' The only possible reply to this is: 'All right, then, let me bid goodbye, and go my own way.' And that's precisely what I am going to do. By the end of May (the end of the contract) I shall be busy writing my novel in Banaras. Also, I have little capacity to learn new arts. I haven't had the mental satisfaction here in the film industry. The directors also do not have satisfaction. But they have nothing else to do, and have to stay on here under compulsion. I, however, can do something else. . . . The people with whom I have to deal know neither Hindi nor Urdu. I have to tell them the meaning of the story by translating it into English."

The film was certified for exhibition in the non-industrial areas of the country. "It hasn't been approved for exhibition in Bombay. It has, however, been certified at Lahore, and is being shown there." Within a week, the Punjab Government, coming to know of the ban in Bombay, banned it. The film was then exhibited in Delhi, where also the authorities banned its exhibition after a few days. The same story repeated in U.P. and C.P.

The other story which Premchand wrote was *Navajeevan*, woven round the theme of Rajput chivalry—a theme which had been the favourite of Premchand during the earliest phase of his literary career. This also is reported to have met with the same fate ultimately, as his earlier story.

The Cinetone, however, still seems to have had grandiose schemes and offered to take Premchand across to the United

\*It was produced by Nanubhai Vakil. Its Tamil version, in which M. Subbalakshmi appeared for the first time in films, is reported to have been excellent.

Kingdom for a year. His acquaintance with the new techniques of scenario writing, they thought, would help the company's future plans of expansion. After his return, they told him, they would expect five or six stories, in return for Rs. 10,000 a year.

Premchand's health was weak, and Mrs. Premchand would not agree to his undertaking a trip overseas. The idea had, therefore, to be dropped.

Within a few months, therefore, Premchand—who had thought that “my presence in the film line may act as a brake”—was disillusioned. “Those who guide the destinies of the cinema,” he wrote to Hisamuddin Ghouri, “unfortunately, consider it as an industry. And what has industry got to do with taste and reform? It knows only how to exploit. Here it exploits the noble sentiments of man. Naked, or semi-naked poses, blood-curdling scenes and rapes, violence, anger, terror and sexual orgies—all these are the instruments of this industry, and it is with these that this industry is murdering humanity.”

“Not one of the objects with which I came here,” Premchand wrote, “has any chance of being achieved. I am not allowed to deviate even an inch from the lines that the producers have followed so long. Vulgarly, according to them, is synonymous with entertainment value. They believe in miracles. Royalty, intrigues by ministers, mock battles and public kissing, are the principal means they employ. I have written a few stories with social themes which the educated classes would like. But these producers are doubtful whether these would be acceptable to the public. Anyway, I have to complete one year of the contract. I had incurred debts and hope to clear some of them. There has been no other gain. The last pages of the novel remain to be written, but I cannot bring myself to devote time to it. I wish to get out of this place and go back to my old seat. There is little money there, but satisfaction there certainly is. Here, it seems, I am wasting my life.”

## For a Lingua Franca

WHILE IN BOMBAY, Premchand attended the Rashtrabhasha Sammelan held on October 27, 1934. In fact, he delivered the welcome address as the Chairman of the Reception Committee, in which he dwelt on "some problems of national language."

As these form a part of Premchand's credo, it is important to mention a few points made by him. Owing to the vastness of the country, he said, India needed a language which could be understood and spoken all over the country—in the same manner as German was in Germany and French in France.

National language provided a cementing force. Without it the country would break up, provincialism become stronger and throttle nationalism, and we would revert to the position which prevailed before the British appeared on the scene in India.

It was a matter of deep regret that, except for Gandhiji, none in this country had appreciated and emphasised the need for a national language. "Those who wish to make India a nation will have to evolve a national language also. . . . The task is so stupendous in magnitude that it is necessary to have an all-India organisation which should recognise its importance and think out ways and means to propagate it."

So long as the intelligentsia of the country felt happy with the supremacy of English, India could not become a nation in the true sense of the word. Thanks to the patronage of the masters, English-knowing people had certain powers and commanded awe and respect, but English could never strike roots in India.

For, it was significant that even after a hundred years of English education in India, there was not one English-writing Indian whose writing could command respect in England.

The most important factor in the development of national language, according to Premchand, was its comprehensibility among the largest number of people, no matter in which province they lived.

The link between language and script was very close. There was no obstacle to provincial languages with Sanskritic origin taking to one script. Urdu, however, had a separate script, and those who were accustomed to writing in Urdu could not be forced to write in Hindi. "If, however, language is one, script is immaterial. The question of script will be decided in course of time, and the script that is more vital will go ahead of others."

Giving examples of good Hindustani and Urdu and Hindi, Premchand showed that the problem could be solved by adding words of Hindi to Urdu vocabulary or words of Urdu to Hindi. People of only one province, however, could not evolve the national language. This language would be evolved only when the people of all the provinces lent their helping hand. Rather than be called Urdu, Hindi, Gujarati or Marathi, this language should be called Hindustani, i.e. the language of Hindustan or India.

"We are not opposed to the provincial languages and would like them to progress as much as they can. With the spread of national language would come the development of national literature. Our literature would cease to be provincial and would become national in character, and Hindustani would take its place among the world languages," he said.

Mention has also to be made of his address to the fourth convocation of the Dakshina Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha at Madras, on December 29, 1934, when he gave away the Rashtrabhasha Visharad degree to 63 men out of the 171 who had been successful in the examination and to 12 women out of 38 who had passed.

The address to the fourth convocation was profound. Herein Premchand—"with a wrinkled face, his eyes full of tenderness, forehead burdened with thoughts of service to literature, knotty moustaches, back bent with financial burdens, and a pale and anaemic body"—again dealt with the "national language and its problems." He praised the great work done by the Sabha single-handed without government aid during the previous fifteen or sixteen years, and the band of selfless workers that Madras State had produced for the propagation of Hindi. "The very people who had strengthened the roots of British administration in India, who had led the people of India in the adoption of English ways," he said, "have now switched over to the propagation of Hindi,

and there is nothing that they cannot do. As they have surpassed many others in the field of English, there is little doubt that they would do so in the case of Hindi also."

The most disgraceful, universal and difficult aspect—and the most naked one—of our slavery to the British, he held, was the supremacy of English language in every walk of life. "If we could end this supremacy of the English language, half the burden of slavery would be off our necks. Like the shackles on the feet of a prisoner, it affected the head and heart of the nation. And what a shame that the intelligentsia mistook these shackles as garlands!"

Our educational institutions, he said, were factories of slavery. They made our youth slaves of needs, exhibitionism and inactivity.

The day of domination of the masses through learning the English language, i.e. of intimidating the people, was coming to an end. "If the British leave—and one day they have to—what would become of our nationhood? Isn't it probable that each province will then try to become a separate unit?"

The national language must be understood by as large a number of people as possible. Its vocabulary must absorb words of other languages. We should have to have a board of writers of Urdu, Hindi, Tamil, Bengali and Marathi, etc. which understood the needs of the national language, for this purpose.

Referring to the two schools of thought, believing in realism and idealism, he said, he was not just a "realist"; if life were to be portrayed as it actually was, it would become only a photograph of life. "For the writer, unlike the sculptor, it is not necessary to be a realist, even though he may attempt to be one. Literature is created to enable humanity to march ahead, to elevate its level of existence. Idealism has to be there even though it should not militate against realism and naturalness. Similarly, it would be good if the realist does not forget idealism. . . . We have to portray noble, idealistic aspirations. Otherwise, of what use would literature be?" Naked realism would be no more than a police report, and naked idealism no more than a speech from the pulpit. What was needed was a blend of the two.

The invitation to deliver the convocation address at Madras provided Premchand with an opportunity to undertake a tour of South Indian cities.

On arrival at Madras on the previous day, Premchand, accompanied by his wife, and Shri Nathuram Premi and Shri Sankaran from the South, was given a very warm welcome by about three hundred men and women, all carrying garlands of roses and camphor. Premchand and his wife were literally drowned in garlands of roses. "It was a reception the like of which we had never had," wrote Mrs. Premchand.

The word went round that he was going to inspect the centres for the propagation of Hindi and people "looked forward to seeing him as they would have Jawaharlal (Nehru) or Rajendra Prasad."

To Premchand, however, the reception was an indication of the success of the propagation of Hindi in South India with which Gandhiji had been associated. In fact, Premchand's visit to the South synchronised with that of Kaka Kalelkar who was "deputed by Mahatma Gandhi to infuse new enthusiasm in the Hindi Prachar work" in the South.

Madras, he said, was the scene of the earliest education in English in India and "we find South Indians everywhere in key positions, in journalistic, medical and educational professions. These people are now taking to Hindi avidly and in a few years' time you'd see that they will go very far. The future of Hindi is indeed very bright."

They stayed in Madras for six days. Then came a visit to Mysore. Here, too, the author was extended a very warm and affectionate welcome and attended several meetings and social functions held in his honour. The visit lasted five days. "It is a beautiful city, the like of which I have never seen in my life," he said about this part of the country of which he had been singing praise in his writings.

From Mysore the party went to Bangalore, where again he stayed for three days, attended literary functions, saw the Indian Institute of Science, where he met C. V. Raman. He also met Mirza Ismail. From Bangalore he had been invited to visit other places too. But Mrs. Premchand was anxious to get back to Bombay where she expected to hear the news of the birth of a grandchild. With a little stopover at Poona, therefore, the family returned to Bombay, promising at every place that they would come again to this "beautiful and culturally advanced" part of India "with the entire family for a longer stay."

"I found that part of India very beautiful indeed," he wrote to Jainendra. "Music is very popular. Every mohalla has a women's organisation; most of them hold classes in Hindi which is making great headway through their efforts. Those who cannot render any other service to the nation are lost in the zeal with which they serve by learning the lingua franca."

Premchand also referred to his "inability to speak in public." He stood there, he said, like a "clown, with garlands. People hoped that here was a great writer of Hindi, who would utter some precious gems. But there was I who did not know what to say. . . ."

His tour, otherwise, was "very good and a successful one."



## Farewell to Films

MEANWHILE, AJANTA CINETONE'S condition worsened. Not a single one of its productions had made a hit. The losses went up. All the experienced and well-known actors, e.g. Jai Raj, Bibbo, Tarabai, left; and the company went into liquidation. Premchand was now in a position to get out of it even before the expiry of his contract in May 1935.

"I am through with it," he wrote to a friend in Hyderabad. "The Ajanta Cinetone is winding up its business. My contract was for a year. Three months still remain for its completion. But I do not wish to increase their burden. I am staying on to collect my salary for the months of February and March. I'll leave here on the 25th (March) and return to Banaras, to get involved again in my favourite literary work."

His conclusion: "It is useless to expect any reform in cinema. This industry is in the hands of the capitalists in the same way as the trade in alcohol. Those who control it are not interested in the effects of their products on the public; instead, they are concerned only with profit. Naked dances, public kissing and rapes—all these, in their eyes, are justified. And the public taste is so low that until they see these debased and vulgar scenes, they do not enjoy the films. Who will take up the job of improving the taste of the public? I see that, through the cinema, all the weaknesses of the West are entering our lives, and we are rendered helpless spectators. The public has little sense to judge what is good and what is bad. Propaganda through the newspapers is in vain. The newspapers too are not outspoken. . . . And when the pictures of actresses and actors are published indiscriminately, and their praises sung, why should not our youth be influenced? Science is God's gift to us. In the hands of the unenlightened, however, it has become a disgrace. I have thought over this problem very deeply, and consider it to be opportune to quit here."

As an epilogue to his adventure in the film-land, it may be mentioned that Himansurai of the Bombay Talkies approached Premchand with an offer. For Premchand, however, there was no turning back. His dreams about the films playing an important role in the regeneration of the nation had melted into thin air. He declined the offer.

After he left the film company, Premchand was also approached to agree to edit a Hindi daily from Bombay on Rs. 600 a month with four assistant editors. Mrs. Premchand was, however, insistent that he should not stay any longer in Bombay and return to Banaras.

Premchand's reaction to the state of affairs in the film-land was so sharp that he subsequently wrote in *Hans* about his unhappy experiences. The atmosphere of the film industry, he wrote, is like that of a salt mine which eats up whatever enters it. "The writers who have entered the film industry and have been witnesses to naked group dances, have done so because they have become a part of the great money-making machine. I had gone there with certain ideals, but I found that the cinema people have certain readymade formulas, and what lies outside those formulas is taboo. The producer wants to ensure that a scene must attract public applause. And it is only when he is confident of this that he reproduces the scene in the film. Ideas other than these are a hoax, and there is no place for them in the film industry."

The guiding principle of this industry, as of any other, he was emphatic, was to produce what the consumer wanted. "If the public wants alcohol, it will open liquor shops and earn money, completely oblivious of the fact that liquor will harm the people economically, morally and spiritually. Its aim is to make money, and the industry thinks it is for the preacher and the saint to propagate self-discipline and abstinence."

During the days of the *swadeshi* movement, none dared utter the slogan "business is business." This ought to be true of cinema also. It should survive only if it could make people happy. If, on the other hand, it aroused the baser elements of human nature and encouraged shamefacedness, stupidity and evil tendencies, the earlier it was put an end to, the better would it be.

Emphasising that during the annual session of the Congress in Bombay the cinema halls in the great city were all empty because the people were drawn to the session—and that, consequently,

the pictures were running at a loss—he held, this only indicated that the popular conception that what the people wanted was massacres, blood-curdling stories, scenes of mob rule, was without any basis. The public also wanted, according to him, to see examples of true love, sacrifice, and friendship. The policeman's mentality and conclusion that the public enjoyed vulgarity, rape and impressive tricks (e.g. jumping from a height of a hundred feet and brandishing of tin swords), and that libido was as important to the film industry as eyes are to the human body, was misleading.

True literature, according to Premchand, was not a camp follower of any group. It gave a lead to the people. The film industry, on the other hand, took its cue from debased public taste and gave the people what they wanted—and not what they should have.

Fame, according to Premchand, might act as a spur to the litterateur. It certainly could not be money. Great writers sacrificed their all, including their lives, in the service of literature, getting nothing substantial out of it. There had, however, been no producer as yet who would produce a film with that ideal.

It was Premchand's belief that only in a free India would the film play its reformistic role. Then there would be a powerful medium in the hands of true artistes—not for the purpose of making money, but for ennobling human existence. And, until India became free, the film could not rise higher than the level of vulgar dances.

Anyway, Premchand left Bombay on April 4, 1935, and wandered here and there—five days with Makhanlal Chaturvedi at Khandua, five days at Sagar (with his son-in-law) and five days at Allahabad—and reached Lamhi on April 24, 1935. He got busy with the finalisation of his *Godan* and also with *Hans*.

Giving a balance-sheet of his income and expenses while in Bombay, Premchand wrote: "I got Rs. 6,300 in all. Of this amount, my sons took away Rs. 1,500, the daughter Rs. 440, the Saraswati Press Rs. 500. On myself and the house in Bombay I spent Rs. 2,500 in ten months, i.e. after exercising extreme care and thrift. I thus returned here with Rs. 1,400 in all. This will now be spent on shifting the press to Allahabad where the prospects appear to be better." Jainendra Kumar asked him to go

and settle down in Delhi, others called him to Lucknow and Kanpur. In any case he did not like Banaras which did not prove to be the suitable place it had appeared to be twelve years earlier. "There is little work here, and there is also little cooperation from writers. The people here are monarchs of one kingdom or another. Somebody is the monarch of the kingdom of poetry; someone else of that of criticism; another one is that of humour. In fact, the city can claim to have only monarchs. How will one monarch get on well with the others? Relations based on formality are far away from cooperation. You, too, I'm afraid, might become a monarch within six months or so. That would be a sad day. It would mean my ruination. I won't then have courage to ask you for contributions. That's why I am thinking of shifting my press and *Hans* to Allahabad—where the monarchs are fewer—and living there." A fortnight later: "I am shifting the press and the office to Allahabad — new surroundings—in the hope that I may fare better there."

One of the considerations for shifting to Allahabad surely was that his two sons were studying there in B.A. and tenth class, respectively, and the common establishment would perhaps mean some economy.

The press, he told Nigam the following month, would remain at Banaras. "I cannot get out of this mess. This unlucky *Jagaran* has meant a loss of six to seven thousand rupees. Arrears to the tune of Rs. 1,500 have still to be paid. And so far as the press is concerned, it has meant to me a loss of Rs. 15,000. What can I do now? What cannot be got rid of has got to be borne. Next September I'll increase the size of *Hans* to 120 pages." When *Godan* had been completed in August, he moved to Banaras.

The position in September, as told to Jainendra, was as follows: "I have not earned a single penny during the last five months. What I brought from Bombay—and it wasn't much anyway—I have spent during this period, or used up to clear off the debts. I am now worried about the future. Most of the copies of *Karmabhoomi* and *Ghaban* have been sold out, but I got practically nothing out of them. A reprint of these books is now called for and worries me. Isn't it possible that you come here and bring out *Jagaran* (again) as a fortnightly? I feel that a fortnightly journal of 32 pages under your editorship, and priced at six annas, could be a success within six months. Each issue of 1,000

would cost Rs. 100 and the income would be about Rs. 130—in other words a profit of Rs. 60 or Rs. 70 per month. I will have to spend on paper and postage only. And this, I think, can be met out of the advertisements.”

It is amusing to note, however, that, while he was inclined towards getting involved again in *Jagaran* which had entailed a good deal of loss, his financial condition was far from satisfactory. Invited by Banarsi Das Chaturvedi to Calcutta on the occasion of the Japanese poet Noguchi's visit, he pleaded inability. “The boys are at Allahabad. If I come to Calcutta, my better half would feel lonely and helpless; and if I take her with me, I must have a decent amount to spend (which I don't have). It is better, therefore, to be tied down to the home than to feel the pinch of money away from it.”\*

But he had opted for it. “I cannot imagine a great man rolling in wealth,” he had told Chaturvedi. “The moment I see a rich man, all his words of art and wisdom are lost upon me. He appears to me to have succumbed to the present social order which is based on exploitation of the poor by the rich. Any great name not dissociated with Mammon, therefore, does not attract me. It is just possible this frame of mind may be due to my own failures in life. With a handsome credit balance, I might also have been just as others are—unable to resist the temptation. But I am glad Nature and fortune have helped me and my lot is cast with the poor. It gives me spiritual relief.”

Two short stories written about this time are significant. One of them, *Jeevan ka Shaap*, portrays the hardships undergone by a responsible editor and compares his domestic life with that of a Parsi commission agent. While the former's wife wishes the husband to earn more so that they could have all the comforts of life, the commission agent's wife cares little for the riches and is unhappy at her husband's going to other women. The commission agent's wife is, in fact, forced to leave her house. Meeting the editor on the way, she enlists his sympathy. While the editor admires her looks, she admires the editor's devotion to his wife, which she herself misses. The editor is prepared to take her to his house, but his wife puts her foot down. (Shrinath

\*The reason given to Jainendra Kumar was, however, somewhat different. “Noguchi came to Banaras University,” he wrote, “but I could not go to hear him even here. I have become old listening to lectures of wise men.”

Singh, incidentally, claimed that Premchand had lifted the idea from his own novel *Uljhan*!)

The other, *Kafan*, one of his best stories, illustrates that, as there is a premium on dishonesty in the present-day society, it is not necessary to work hard. Indeed, the present-day economic system forces the clever to shirk work, to command honour because of their being a terror to others and to tell lies to make a living. The most moving aspect, in fact, is the callousness to which this attitude can lead to. Madho's wife, Budhiya, who has worked hard to feed them, lies in labour pains on death-bed, and her husband and his father distrust each other so much that they sit by the fire wherein stolen potatoes are being baked. And the two compete in eating the potatoes which are too hot and burn their palates. The woman is dead. The father-in-law now goes round begging money for the last rites and the shroud. When, however, the money has been collected, they enter a wine shop, and spend all the money they have on drinks and food. They are happy and in their true form, and bless Budhiya who, even in her death, has given them joy and happiness. The son feels that her cremation should have been proper. "Who'd notice the shroud in the dark?" asks the father who is happy that she has been released from the wordly bondage.

*Do Bahnen* puts in sharp contrast the life of two sisters, the elder one, the wife of a low-paid clerk, and the younger, the wife of a salesman who gets five times more salary. The younger one dresses well, goes about in a car and shows off. The elder sister curses her fate and her husband. She wants her husband also to learn the ways of making easy money. One day, the husband of the elder sister invites the brother-in-law to the house. In a state of drunkenness, the young man blurts out all his secrets—illicit trade in cocaine through a network of agents and with the connivance of a large number of corrupt officials whom he bribes. The elder sister is horrified to learn of the ways and dangers of making easy money and wishes her husband to keep to his path in life.

*Jurmana* shows how the heart of a municipal sanitary inspector, Munshi Khairat Ali, who every now and then and every month fines Allahrakhi, a sweeppress, melts when he sees her being pestered by her sick daughter. When she tells the daughter that the cruel inspector would further cut her wages, and that she was already faced with the problem of medical treatment for her, the inspector

passes that way and is moved by her hard work. At the end of the month, when she thinks that she has lost her job, she gets the full month's wages, without any cut! She hesitates to believe her eyes because fines have become a part of her life.

*Smriti ke Pujari* is a character sketch of a widower attached to the memory of his wife. To tell everyone that he meets of his wonderful, pretty wife is his obsession.

*Yeh bhi Nasha woh bhi Nasha* has the theme of a newly-arrived British District Collector who wishes to mix with the people socially and visits the Rai Sahib, one of the stooges, on the Holi day. He throws colour and is sprinkled over with it. He takes *bhang* also. When, on the following day, the Rai Sahib returns his visit, the British civilian offers him alcohol, but Rai Sahib's "religion" does not permit it. The British civilian is unable to understand the sharp distinction between one addiction and another. It is with great difficulty that the Rai Sahib is able to extricate himself from the situation.

*Prem ki Holi* is woven round the seventeen-year-old Gangi who has been a widow for some three years. Everyone pities her. On the day of the Holi festival, she is attracted by the sweet voice of a young *thakur* from the neighbouring village. It is a sort of love at first sight. But she is shy, so is he. After a visit or two, the *thakur* is not seen. A year passes. Another Holi arrives. But the youth of the neighbouring villages do not arrive. She goes up to the village temple and sees that in the neighbouring village there is a bonfire. She rushes to tell the father that it is the Holi bonfire. The father tells her that the Holi bonfire was lit on the previous day. As Gangi is insistent, he goes to the temple tower and sees that there is really a fire, but at the cremation grounds. Others tell him that it is the cremation of the young *thakur* from the neighbouring village.

*Tathya* is a tale of platonic love. Purnima, for whom her neighbour, Amrit, has great love and affection since childhood days, is married to someone from outside the village. According to Amrit, her husband is ugly, and he wonders how Purnima can love him. His memory of her is ever green and he is always looking forward to her visits to the village when he could see her and play with her children. Amrit, who is now married, still has a soft corner for Purnima. When Purnima becomes a widow and returns to the village in mourning, bent upon living the life of a

widow devoted to the memory of her husband, Amrit is baffled. He now realises that the human heart which can consider a stone or an earthen image to represent God, can also worship the picture of ugliness as the picture of beauty.

In *Motor ki Chhinten*, a priest beats up the owner of a motor car which splashes mud on his clothes. Thanks to the rich food, the priest is very hefty.\* He terrorises every passerby and slaps the motorists. When, however, he hears that the police is about to arrive on the scene, he just runs for his life.

*Motayram ki Diary* caricatures Motayram fattening himself on his clients in Bombay. It shows the reactions of a rustic parasite to his new environments.

*Rahasya* makes a puzzle of the life of one who is devoted to Sevashram for teaching girls. In response to his advertisement, comes a married woman who leaves her husband to serve the school. The two are attracted to each other. The man never betrays his true feelings and she is left guessing. Ultimately, she resigns her assignment and leaves—he is too timid to say anything—to “bag” another young man, an ICS officer. When subsequently they meet by chance, she introduces the ex-boss as a man devoted to his “noble work.”

*Kashmiri Seb*, published in the October 1936 issue of *Hans*, which was the last Premchand was associated with, is in the nature of a filler, and gives an insight into the ways Premchand did his shopping of fruits and vegetables.

While the stories in the earlier chapter were now published in two volumes entitled *Mansarovar*,\* some of the short stories in this chapter came to be published posthumously in *Kafan*.

\*Since Premchand's death, his short stories, which were published in different volumes, have been collected in another six volumes of *Mansarovar*. His son, Amritrai, is publishing another two volumes of short stories which lie scattered in the Hindi and Urdu journals.



## All-India Forum for Writers

ONE OF PREMCHAND'S principal objectives in starting *Hans* in 1930 was to give in the Devanagari script the best of all the Indian languages and thus lay the foundations of national literature. The magazine had a section devoted entirely to developments in different Indian languages and published short stories translated from Telugu, Kannada, Bengali, Gujarati, Urdu, Malayalam, etc.

Premchand felt unhappy that, while there were all-India organisations for Indian philosophy, science, history, mathematics, education, there was none which interested itself in literature. Writing in *Hans* in February 1932 (after a 12-day visit to Bombay in connection with the filmisation of his *Sevasadan*) he had said that there was little exchange between one Indian language and another and that the people of one province knew next to nothing of the literary treasures of other languages. Bengali-speaking people, for instance, knew nothing of what was being published in Gujarati; nor, for that matter, did the Marathi-speaking people know anything of current Bengali creations. This tendency, according to Premchand, was strengthening provincialism as against nationalism. While the people of India had access, through the medium of English, to German, Swedish, French, Russian, Belgian and Polish literatures, it was a sad commentary that, in regard to the treasures of Indian languages, we knew possibly only of the works of a few Bengali writers and nothing about what was being written in, say, Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Gujarati. Writers of each provincial language, he pointed out, held their annual meetings, but there was none at the all-India level.

The fact that the most advanced languages in the world felt it necessary to form the PEN (the aims of which were published in the same issue of *Hans*) was an argument in favour of the great need for an organisation which could bring writers of all the Indian languages together. The time had come to bring about a closer relationship between the different Indian languages so

that their diverse trends could be blended to help the formation not only of the national language but also to help the growth of national literature. The national language must absorb the traits of the different Indian languages; and help all the literatures of the different languages get out of their grooves and switch over from the provincial plane on to the national. This could be brought about only with the help of provincial litterateurs.

Eminent writers of Gujarati, Premchand reported, were interested to set up an all-India organisation and wished to approach the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan for its help. Premchand welcomed the idea and appealed to the Sammelan to take initiative in this regard. "The Sammelan's steps in this direction would be appreciated by the writers of all Indian languages, and this would be a service not only to the *Rashtrabhasha* but also to the nation."

Among those who seem to have discussed it at some length with Premchand while the latter was in Bombay, particularly from June 1934 to April 1935, was K. M. Munshi. And close to Munshi was Kaka Saheb Kalelkar. These two seemed to have approached Gandhiji for his blessings and help in the work of bringing together on a single platform "formidable litterateurs who were like lions, safe enough in their cages but difficult to be kept and be made to work together." Gandhiji agreed to initiate the work, but on the condition that the organ of the proposed organisation should not carry advertisements. That a journal could be run without advertisements, he said, was shown by the success of *Harijan*. It was suggested that the journal be made self-supporting by accepting advertisements of life insurance companies.\* "How could you draw a line of distinction between one advertisement and another?" asked the Mahatma.

Gandhiji was closely associated with the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. So were most of the sponsors. It was natural, therefore, that the project of founding an all-India organisation for writers of all the different languages be implemented with the assistance, and association, of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan.\*\*

\*The December 1935 issue of *Hans* carried a prominently displayed announcement that the journal would not accept any advertisement other than those relating to literary and educational institutions.

\*\*The Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, a literary organisation set up in 1910, met every year and called fraternal delegates from provincial Parishads.

The 1935 session of the *Sammelan*, held at Indore under the chairmanship of Gandhiji, who presided over the session after a lapse of some seventeen years, passed a resolution that the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad, or an "all-India literary council," be set up to consider the ways and means of creating a brotherhood of writers through the medium of the Rashtrabhasha, so that in due course there could be the evolution of a national language and a national literature.\*

Premchand, who had just returned from Bombay, was busy meeting his relations and his children at Allahabad. His two sons got measles and he was also keen to undertake repairs to his house in the village. Premchand, who seems to have planned to go to Indore with Nathuram Premi—who had promised to join him so that the two could travel together to Indore, but did not turn up—could not, therefore, be present at Indore.

However, the proceedings of the *Sammelan* were of immense interest to him, particularly the resolution regarding the setting up of the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad, a project very close to his heart. He welcomed the move. "K. M. Munshi's letter says that the *Sammelan* has passed a resolution for the setting up of an all-India literary council. Passing a resolution was not difficult. Who has been entrusted with implementing it? How will the idea be worked out? *Hans* is prepared to go so far as to approach the writers of different provincial languages, get their articles and stories and publish them."

The implementing committee consisting of K. M. Munshi (Bombay), Harihar Sharma (Madras) and Pandit Girdhariji Sharma (Jhalrapatam), set up by the session, wished to take over *Hans*, as a preliminary step, to make it an organ of the proposed all-India organisation.

Premchand agreed to make *Hans* the mouthpiece of provincial literatures and visited Bombay. The 1935 August-September issue, in fact, carried an announcement that *Hans* would be turned

\*The *Sammelan* had several important sections for its deliberations called the *Itihas Parishad*, *Vigyan Parishad*, *Darshan Parishad*, *Sahitya Parishad*, etc. There was thus a Sahitya Parishad of the Hindi Sahitya *Sammelan*. The all-India organisation proposed to be set up was named the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad. In the welter of Hindi-Urdu controversy, the Hindi Sahitya *Sammelan*'s Sahitya Parishad came to be confused with the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad, and writers and even important persons including Rajendra Prasad, Maulana Abdul Huq and others confused these names.

over to a limited concern. A letter, dated September 27, 1935, bears the names of Premchand and K. M. Munshi as co-editors. The next issue, of 120 pages, appeared as the "mouthpiece of Indian literature" published by Hans Limited (111, Esplanade Road, Bombay, and Banaras), under the joint editorship of Premchand and K. M. Munshi. While the cover was printed at the Associated Advertisers' Press of Bombay, the rest was printed at the Saraswati Press of Banaras Cantonment. The issue carried a message from "Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi" saying: "*Hans* is a unique venture in the whole of India. If Hindi-Hindustani is to become the Rashtrabhasha of the country, it is essential to have a monthly journal of this type. Whatever is written in each provincial language must be introduced, through the Rashtrabhasha, to all others. I am happy, therefore, that this introduction will be arranged for all those who desire it through *Hans* at half a rupee a month."\*

The appearance of this particular issue coincided with the birth anniversary of Gandhiji. *Hans* joined in the chorus of tributes to him for the awakening that his personality had brought about in the life of the nation, which could very well be called a revolution. "The ideals of life that he has placed before the nation are such that they raise human existence on to the plane of the angels. They are the pinnacles of our ideals of human existence. What is literature but an instrument of our awakening? If we look deeply into it, there is a sharp division between the pre-Gandhian literature and the literature of the Gandhian era; the latter pulsates with action, ideas of freedom, simplicity of life, fearlessness and the courage to lay down our lives for ideals and principles. The absurd discussion of art for art's sake taking place now, and which ridicules the school advocating usefulness of art, has been quietened. By laying emphasis on the useful role of literature and art, Gandhiji has dragged it out of the mire of sentimentalism. . . . The far-sightedness that he has displayed in making Hindi the Rashtrabhasha is a reflection of his great personality. Our dream of unity among Indian literatures is also the gift of his blessing. There can be no two opinions about the fact that the awakening and esteem that have been showered upon Hindi, through his efforts, are unprecedented. By giving India a national language

\*The price was subsequently raised to ten annas from January 1936.

age, he has given a tongue to the dumb. And if we make proper use of his gift to us, the day is not far when India's nationhood will be held firmly by the bonds of literature and culture."

In an editorial note in the same issue, Premchand traced the basic unity of approach in the provincial literatures, and answered why Hindi, and not English, should be the medium for unifying the country. *Hans*, he wrote, was appearing with the great ambition of being the mouthpiece of the literatures of all parts of India. There was nothing concrete about the nationhood idea. It was an approach—an approach brought about by the desires of millions of people of this country. Innumerable Indians today gave evidence of this approach through their actions and thoughts, that the whole of India was one and indivisible. "This approach finds expression in many ways, through English by the English-knowing people, and by others through the medium of the provincial languages. But all these lead to one direction, i.e. without a Rashtabhasha and a national literature, the nation cannot be unified. . . . Whatever be the national language, it must be strengthened by the powerful elements of the provincial languages. A representative Indian literature can be that which has absorbed the basic values of the all-sided development of the provincial languages. And the national personality should be visible to all through national literature."

The aim of this new venture, according to Premchand, was to procure and present to the Hindi-reading public the best specimens of literary compositions in the different Indian languages, and thus to lay the foundations of a truly national literature to which writers and authors of all the Indian languages would make their own contributions.

The Hans Limited, which now brought out *Hans* as the mouthpiece of all the provincial literatures of the country, constituted an advisory board of 22 members,\* the first being Gandhiji.

\*The other 21 members included: Hindi—Purushottam Das Tandon, Maithili Sharan Gupta, Ram Naresh Tripathi, Acharya Kalelkar, Sardar Narmada Prasad Singh; Urdu—Prof. Muhammed Aqil, Syed Sajjad Zaheer; Bengali—Dr. Kalidas Nag; Assamese—N. C. Bardoloi; Oriya—Neelkantha Das; Gujarati—Dewan Bahadur K. M. Jhaveri and Acharya Anand Shanker Bapubhai Dhruv; Marathi—Sardar M. V. Kibe, Prof. Datto Vaman Potdar; Kannada—D. R. Pendre, R. R. Diwakar; Telugu—K.

While K. M. Munshi did write some of the editorial notes, bulk of the editorial work continued to be done by Premchand who also corresponded with writers for contributions, etc. and who had *Hans* printed at his own Saraswati Press in Banaras.

While, however, *Hans* had become the official organ of the proposed Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad, the latter had not really come into being.

Nageshwar Rao Pantulu; Tamil—C. Rajagopalachari, R. Krishnamurti; Malayalam—Vallathol Narayan Menon, Sardar K. M. Panikkar.

This composition of the Board, announced first in the February 1936 issue of *Hans*, was followed in the next issue by giving Gandhiji's name on top of the list again, but without the serial number 1.

## Literature and Religion

THOUGHTS ON THE problems of literature and religion, particularly the former's role in countering religious fanaticism and provincialism, were Premchand's principal preoccupations at this time. He expressed his crystallised views not only to individuals but also to various literary gatherings which were always largely attended. He attended the Hindustani Academy meetings, presided over the Progressive Writers Association's first conference, conferred with writers in Delhi, went to Lahore to address the Aryabhasha Sammelan convened by the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Punjab on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary, and, of course, attended the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad's meetings.

Premchand did not believe in any formal or ceremonial religion. Nor was he ever interested in going to the temple, the mosque, or the church. Not that he considered it bad for the people to have faith in any religion, but he could not accept for himself the limitations imposed by conventional religion. "My way of living and my culture are, in fact, a blend of the Hindu and the Muslim," he said. "The impact of Muslim culture on me is actually deeper than that of the Hindu; I learnt Persian and Urdu from a *maulvi* long before I started reading and writing Hindi."

Premchand's belief verged on atheism. "I don't know how to have faith in God," he wrote to Jainendra Kumar. "While you are going towards having a belief in Him—in fact are becoming a believer—my doubts are making me an atheist." It was not necessary, according to Premchand, to have faith in God. "You may believe in Him for giving you solace in time of difficulty, to fill some vacuum in your life, or to excite your hopes. But religion essentially is a projection of one's own self." To make a fetish of religion and to be dogmatic and narrow-minded, was against his grain.

One of the ways to counter the evils of narrow-mindedness, according to Premchand, was through the "progressivism" of the new and coming generation. He welcomed and evinced a good deal of interest in the formation of the Indian Progressive Writers Association in London, and felt happy that the educated and thinking youth were keen to revitalise Indian literature. "If the new Association stuck to the course charted in the Manifesto, it would usher in a new epoch in literature."

And Premchand agreed with all the aims, except the one regarding the script, about which he held that a properly reformed Devanagari script could meet the need. He wished the association success and long life. The literature envisaged by the association, he said, was precisely what India needed. "*Hans* too was started with identical aims." The Writers Guild, he said, too had similar aims, and there was no reason why the two should not cooperate.

On February 14, 1936, Premchand attended a meeting at Sajjad Zaheer's house to discuss the formation of the Indian Progressive Writers Association in India. Premchand's friend Nigam was apprehensive of the prospects of an association of this type. But Premchand thought that the time had come for such an association. "I am an old man but wish to do what all young writers wish to do. I, therefore, would launch my unsteady boat on the stormy seas. In what direction it goes is hardly of consequence."

The meeting was preceded by one of the Hindustani Academy on January 12-14, 1936, where too this "lean man of medium height with a happy face and eyes full of tenderness arising out of suffering, predominantly white-haired, thick moustache, dressed

\*He published a summary of the Manifesto and the aims of the Association in his journal *Hans*. The aims were: (1) to set up associations of writers of different provinces of India, to establish a close relationship between them through conferences, pamphlets, and the provincial literary associations, the central association and the London association; (2) to bring together those associations and organisations which did not work counter to the ideals outlined in the Manifesto; (3) to create and translate progressive literature, which would bridge the cultural divisions and help India's struggle for independence and her social regeneration; (4) to protect the interests of the writers, and to render assistance to those who needed it for the publication of their works; (5) to work for the freedom of ideas and thought; and (6) to work for the acceptance of the Indo-Roman script for use by all the Indian languages.



in a *sherwani* and a *chust pyjama*, his longish hair jutting out of the Gandhi cap," was quite an attraction. One of those present was surprised at his deep knowledge of art, derived possibly from Western books but "with the touch of an individuality of his own."

These meetings were followed soon afterwards by visits to Purnea and Agra, and a visit to Delhi to broadcast a short story from the All India Radio. The visit provided an opportunity to bring together the Urdu and Hindi writers of Delhi.

Premchand, accompanied by his wife, went to Delhi on March 4, 1936, i.e. round about Holi, and stayed with Jainendra Kumar. A visit to him, he had felt, was overdue. For, a few months earlier (December), Jainendra Kumar had lost his mother and Premchand had written to him: "I had apprehended it. Few with this ailment survive. I have thought of coming to Delhi, but my son-in-law is here for the last three days and my daughter will perhaps leave with him. I also think that there is nothing with which I can console you. This had to be. When, however, I think of what she meant to you, and that, in her lifetime, you were going about like a young man at this age, then I feel like hugging you and weeping with you. Apart from her affection for you, to her you symbolised life. You were her eyes and her everything. Few lucky ones get mothers like her. I can see that you are unhappy and wish to share your bereavement, that is if you'd agree to share it half and half. But why should you share it? You would like to keep it in safe custody—close to your heart. If you could, please do come here for a few days. I also feel like coming to Delhi, but if I come I would like to leave in two or three days. You too, however, are in the same position as myself now. Your carefreeness is gone. In fact, it was my jealousy that took away your mother. I was seven when my mother died. You had one at 27. How could I bear it? We are alike now. No, I am better. I don't remember even her looks. Yours is there before you; but she keeps aloof."

Needless to say, Premchand felt one with Jainendra's family. After breakfast—and this was the day of Holi—Premchand sat on the cot in the open, brushing his teeth, wearing just a vest and dhoti which hid his pale and thin body. Just then came a group of people of ages from five to fifty. They all aimed

their water pumps and colour at him. Premchand, caught un-awares, was drenched thoroughly. He got up, assessed the situation, and gave his characteristic laughter.

"Is this the end?" asked Premchand, "or, is there something yet to come?"

"It is Holi. This cannot be the end."

Premchand again gave his characteristic laughter. "If that be so, I won't change my clothes. Here I am. Let anyone come and do his worst."

It is interesting, however, to note that when the Deputy Director General of All India Radio, A. S. Bokhari, a friend of Imtiaz Ali-Taj, who knew him as "Patras," hugged Premchand, the latter was taken aback.

"Who was it?" he asked Jainendra Kumar later.

"He embraced you and you should know," said Jainendra Kumar.

"He must be Bokhari then."

Premchand went to Jamia Millia on March 8 and persuaded the staff to call a meeting to which were to be invited Urdu and Hindi writers, the latter through Jainendra Kumar.

There was an informal discussion after tea. Premchand impressed on those present the need to get together for a sympathetic exchange of views and standpoints without which there could be no emotional integration and unity in the country. Such meetings, he said, were absolutely essential to forge a unity of thought among the writers of the two languages for the national good.

The living literatures of the world, said Premchand, had made history and culture. "The writer is the path-finder of the nation. His heart is brimming with affection. In his heart there is no place for fanaticism or bigotry. Who are the people that fight the war-psychosis? It is the writers. Is there a revolution whose foundation was not laid by writers? And there is no denying the fact that the nation's unity can be forged by a unity of culture, which can be brought about only through a mutual exchange of ideas and mutual sympathy."

The meeting resulted in the formation of a Hindustani Sabha whose members undertook to create a simple and commonly understood language with as few difficult words of Sanskrit or Persian or Arabic languages as possible.

"The Hindustani Sabha at Delhi was the result of the joint efforts of Jainendra and myself," he wrote to B. D. Chaturvedi. "How can we get that breadth of vision and that catholicity of mind, so indispensable to literary workers, if we don't associate ourselves with the authors of other languages, cultivate their friendship, seek light on literary problems, exchange ideas and compare notes? We in India have not tried to fraternise with writers of other Indian languages . . . as they do in Europe where they hold international literary conferences, discuss all possible subjects having a bearing on literature. Urdu, undoubtedly, has cultural associations, and it is only through coming into contact with the writers of that language that we realise our own weaknesses. Urdu writers are more social and sympathetic. . . . Jainendra was in Lahore recently, addressed several meetings and organised a Hindustani Sabha there. He is full of enthusiasm and has become one of their admirers. Our politicians cannot be broadminded. . . . They are a hopeless lot. We have to bridge the gulf between Hindi and Urdu writers. The writers will have to give a lead, and they can do so only by becoming friends, rather than as opponents. . . .

"The Hindustani Sabha, as set up, will hold fortnightly meetings on literary and philological problems. In a mixed audience, a speaker has to curb his tendency to be high falutin so as to be understood. If we could arrange such Sabhas in all the important cultural centres, we would broaden the present narrow and exclusive outlook that we have. Our literature would then be richer and fuller. This is the only solution to the problem of *lingua franca*. . . . Provincialism is a new menace and we have to be on our guard. If you could organise a Hindi-Bengali or a Hindustani Sabha in Calcutta and bring together the Urdu, Hindi and Bengali writers occasionally, it would be useful."

Bengali literature, he felt, was more than a provincial literature. It had already arisen above the provincial plane. "But we, the Hindi writers, are not yet familiar with the recent developments in that literature. As Hindi literature progresses, it realises its own importance. That's why the number of translations into Hindi has gone down recently. But Bankim, Tagore, Romesh, D. L. Roy, Sarat Chandra belong to the whole of India, some of them even to the world. We in other parts of India need to know more of them. Great writers do not belong

to one province or to any one country. When we are part of the same nation, we should be as proud of Bankim as of Iqbal or Josh."

The Progressive Writers Association, meanwhile, made good progress. It started work with great enthusiasm and set up branches in Aligarh, Lahore, Delhi, Amritsar and Lucknow, etc. "It is going to have branches in Bengal, Madras, Maharashtra and Andhra and other provinces. The Association's aim is to encourage progressive arts and literature, to portray realistically the conditions of the people, to clearly elucidate the joys and sorrows and the struggles of masses, and to lead them to a bright future for which mankind is striving today."

Invited by the Executive Committee of the Association to preside over the first annual session to be held in Lucknow on April 9 and 10, 1936, Premchand suggested the names of Dr. Zakir Husain, K. M. Munshi and Jawaharlal Nehru; for it would be better if someone outside the Association presided. "If none agrees," he told Sajjad Zaheer, "I am, of course, there." In the end it was Premchand who delivered the presidential address which he wrote while crouching on the *gaddi* and reciting poems of Iqbal.

The address dealt with the aims and objects of literature and the duty of a litterateur. Pioneers had given shape to the language, he said, but language was only the means, not an end. The time had come when we must look to the content and substance also, so as to achieve what the pioneers of Hindustani language had set out to.

Literature, according to Premchand, was a mirror of the times. "The ideas that move the hearts of people at a given time also dominate literature of the age." When the nation's fortunes had been at their lowest ebb, ideas of romance and renunciation dominated not only the people, but also literature. Now, however, our literary proclivities were changing fast. Literature was no longer a means for the entertainment of people. It had some other objectives too. It should deal with the problems of life, and attempt to resolve them. The goal of the moral law and literature was the same, only the media employed differed. Morality attempted to bring about an impact on the minds of men through logic. Literature, on the other hand, looked to mental attitudes and emotions; what inspired us to create literature were

the experiences, observations and the onslaught of time. In the olden times, religion gave a lead to society, and the basis of man's spiritual and moral values was religious instruction which, in effect, took recourse to fear or temptations. The ideas of good and evil were the means employed. Literature had now taken up this work and its means were the love for the beautiful. The writer, through his vast knowledge and the universality of his ideas, must arouse us and widen our mental horizons; his own insight should be so deep, so sharp and so wide that we should get spiritual satisfaction and strength through reading his works. Literature is a manifestation of the writer's spiritual blending, and it was this blending which created the beautiful, not destroyed it. It strengthened the traits in us of faithfulness, truth, sympathy, pity, equity and equality. . . . Literature should make our lives more natural and free. In other words, it was through literature that our ideas were shaped. And that was its principal objective.

The name Progressive Writers Association appeared to him to be redundant, because a writer or an artist must be progressive by nature. If that was not so, he would not have become a writer or an artist. . . . Brotherhood and equality, culture and love had been the dream of idealists ever since the beginning of society. Prophets and great leaders of religion had tried to achieve this dream by religious, moral and spiritual restrictions in the past, but their attempts were in vain. Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed, all tried to build the structure of equality on the foundation of the moral law. But none achieved success. And the differences between the rich and the poor were never perhaps so wide. "We have now to create a social order wherein equality is not dependent on restrictions imposed by moral law only, but gets a solid base. Our literature must have that as its principal objective." Our yardstick of the beautiful must also undergo a change. Its measure in the past had been related to the rich and the licentious, and it had been oblivious of the lot of the poor of whom the writers made a fun. Art could not then believe that these people living in thatched huts and ruins, could also have a heart and entertain hopes and aspirations. . . . If the artist had the insight he would see that if the painted lips and rouged faces had hidden the pride of beauty, these withered lips and downcast eyes reflected sacrifice, faith and fortitude. "There

is nothing showy about them and there is no refinement, but there is goodwill."

We should not rest content at putting down on paper the plight of millions who had been enslaved and exploited; we must also bring into being the social order which did not militate against beauty and against self-respecting well-intentioned individuals.

The role of the litterateur was not merely to grace the drawing rooms of the rich and to entertain them. "Don't, for heaven's sake, pull down his stature so much. He is not the one to make the rearguard of the patriots and the statesmen; he is the one who shows the way."

Our litterateurs, Premchand held, lacked the power to act. The objectives that the writer had laid before himself till now required no action. Lack of action was, in fact, its chief characteristic; for action brought with it a bias and narrow-mindedness. If a man, who was religious, prided himself on his religiosity, it would be far better if he became a rake and a glutton.

The true literature of his conception was what was characterised by his thinking which pulsed with the ideas of freedom, the essence of beauty, the soul of creation, the light and the truth of life—that which would create dynamism and restlessness and arouse us to struggle, and not induce us to sleep. "Any more sleep now would be a sign of death."

Premchand's views on literature's role in life were recognised by writers in all parts of India. During his visit to Lahore, he was welcomed by writers of Hindi and Urdu who invited him to address various literary groups, e.g. a meeting jointly organised by the Literary League and the then recently-formed Hindustani Sabha, and also meetings at the Y.M.C.A. and at the Lajpatrai Bhavan. He was invited by friends too, like Chandragupta Vidyalkar who, on behalf of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, had arranged his visit to Lahore, Veda Vyasa, a publisher, and friend Imtiaz Ali Taj, who had invited a distinguished audience including Sir Sikander Hyat Khan to meet him and had arranged a musical soiree. While the guests waited for him, the simply dressed Premchand, who walked to Taj's house and arrived late, saw the large number of cars outside the host's house and wondered if he had come to the wrong place !

The biggest function, however, was the Aryabhasha Sammelan at the Guru Dutt Bhavan, Lahore, where thousands of people

—by far the biggest crowd that he had ever faced in life—had gathered to hear the great Hindi writer.

Religion, he told the *Sammelan*, was what showed the way to a drop of water to find its way to the ocean. It guided the individuals to merge themselves into the wider circle of humanity. "If our religion teaches us that humanity, sympathy and fraternity are for only those of the same religion, then I would not like to be religious and would stay out of it. . . ."

Sages and politicians, he held, had put us on the wrong path and it was for the litterateurs to create a suitable climate and awaken the truly religious tendencies in us.

Arya Samaj, Premchand said, had proved that service to society and nation was a proof of the life of a religion. It had done far-reaching work in solving the problems of national life, taking pioneering steps for the uplift of the Harijans, promoting the education of girls, eliminating discrimination in regard to caste and community eating. Its preachers had made the teachings of the Vedas and other scriptures the property of the common man and thus brought it out of the hands of scholars and sages who had kept it heavily guarded and securely locked. Through the revival of *Gurukuls*, Arya Samaj had attempted to make the educational system integrated and multifaced—the development of mind and heart, character and body. It was Swami Dayanand who had realised that, if his message had to be taken to the masses, it could be only through Hindi.

Our so-called educated classes, Premchand said, were moving away from the masses. "A language which is known only to a few educated persons is artificial, lifeless and heavy. . . . Their voice is their own, and not of the people which alone could have depth, warmth and maturity."

Differences of the heart arose out of differences of language. If we agreed that India needed a national language understood all over the country, we would have to work extremely hard, start organisations where writers could get together periodically to discuss literary problems or to deliberate over the current trends.

Provincialism, he warned, was asserting itself in many of the provinces of India and there was a danger lest the cry of "India for Indians" be drowned in the cries for provinces. "If the cry for 'Punjab for the Punjabis' and 'Bengal for the Bengalees'

gathers force, the heaven of nationalism might disappear and India again become a cluster of principalities of rajas." One hundred and fifty years of slavery should have opened our eyes, but provincialism was again raising its ugly head, and the differences in outlook had already prepared the ground for it. Provincial autonomy would mean the death of nationalism still in its infancy.

Differences of language and literature divided us into provinces, and if we eliminated these differences, the stream of national culture would flow and prove to be the strongest cementing force. It was with this object that a monthly journal *Hans* had been started. And it was with this same object that a proposal for the establishment of the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad had been mooted.



## Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad

THE FIRST MEETING of the proposed Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad was scheduled to be held on April 3 and 4 at Wardha. Owing to several factors, including Gandhiji's indifferent health, however, it was postponed till the 25th annual session of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan which had initiated the move.

Because of the eminent position held by Premchand in the realm of letters, it seems, his name was one of those informally proposed for the presidency<sup>6</sup> of the Sammelan. The President of the Sammelan, it was said, was a dummy and Purushottam Das Tandon, according to past convention, was to decide all the policies. Premchand's reaction, anyway, was unfavourable. "I am not anxious. My ambition has never been in that direction. I shall not welcome it even."

The President-elect for the Sammelan's Nagpur session was Rajendra Prasad, a "better choice than which they could not have made."

The Hindi Sahitya Sammelan thus met in Nagpur under the chairmanship of Rajendra Prasad. The Sammelan set up a committee, with Gandhiji as Chairman and Rajendra Prasad as Vice-chairman but "effective" chairman, to implement the proposal to set up the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad with its office in Wardha. It authorised the committee formally to make *Hans* the official organ of the Parishad. It also appointed a sub-committee of seven members,\* to help promote the work of the Parishad.

Kaka Kalelkar, the Chairman of the Reception Committee of the proposed Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad, in his inaugural address to the session—held on April 24 in the Convocation

\*Purushottam Das Tandon, Premchand, Ram Naresh Tripathi, Dev Sharma Abhaya, Brijlal Biyani, Makhan Lal Chaturvedi and Pandit Jaya Chandra Vidyalankar. (Rajendra Prasad, K. M. Munshi, Kaka Kalelkar and Harihar Sharma constituted a liaison committee.)

Hall of the Nagpur University and attended by about 200 delegates including some of the highest in the land—referred to the difficult problems facing literature and also to the forces of communalism and provincialism which were the principal maladies that adversely affected the unity of the country. Gandhiji's printed address, as Chairman of the inaugural session, was distributed to the delegates, but he supplemented it by a few remarks which, despite their common points, assumed the character of an independent address. The Parishad, Gandhiji said, was to ensure the propagation, through Hindustani, of all that was noble, healthy and elevating to the soul in all the Indian languages. He deplored the hide-bound attitude of writers to remain within their own linguistic and cultural compartments, not even ready to acquaint themselves with the language and literature of the neighbouring provinces. Not only the existing literary treasures had to be made available in a language which could be easily learnt by the masses in all the provinces, but even new literature had to be created—new literature of a healthy type. "Today a plethora of highly objectionable erotic literature has flooded all the provinces. Indeed, there are some who say that, barring the erotic, there is no other *rasa* worth the name. And to propagate the erotic, those who insist on restraint in literature are characterised as believers in renunciation and are held to ridicule. . . . If you are not annoyed, I would go to the length of saying that the erotic is the lowest of all *rasas*, and, when it partakes of the obscene, it is wholly to be eschewed. If I had the power, I would taboo all literature calculated to promote communalism, fanaticism, ill-will and hatred between individuals and classes of races."

There was no hostility, according to Gandhiji, between the functions of the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad and the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan. It was not the function of the latter to bring together all the provincial literatures. Its object was limited, namely, service to Hindi and its propagation. The Parishad's object, on the other hand, was not to serve Hindi but to collect the best gems of all provincial literatures and to present them to large masses of people.

The afternoon session, held again under the chairmanship of Gandhiji, met to discuss the agenda items which included a decision on the language wherein the work of the Parishad was to be

carried on—whether it was to be “Hindustani” or “Hindi-Hindustani.” While the discussion was on, Gandhiji had to leave and Jawaharlal Nehru, who took the chair, laid emphasis on the larger questions facing literature. He felt that “a closer touch with the masses would resolve many of the problems.”

The proposal for setting up the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad was approved on April 25. The Hindi Sahitya Sammelan, as also the Maharashtra Sahitya Sammelan, the Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad, the Kannad Sahitya Sammelan and the Gujarati Sahitya Sammelan (which had supported the move) were thanked and the aims of the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad were spelt out.

The working committee of the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad consisted of Mahatma Gandhi (Chairman), Rajendra Prasad (Vice-chairman), K. M. Munshi and Kaka Kalelkar (Secretaries); Jammalal Bajaj (Treasurer); and Purushottam Das Tandon, Jawaharlal Nehru, Premchand, Maulana Abdul Huq, Mohammed Aqil, Sardar Kibe, N. S. Subbarao, C. Rajagopalachari, A. Kaleswar Rao, Sardar Panikkar, Kalidas Nag, Ram Naresh Tripathi, Dev Sharma Abhaya, Pandit Makhanlal Chaturvedi, Brijlal Biyani and Pandit Jaya Chandra Vidyalankar (members). It was left to this committee to draw up a constitution and to define the scope of the Parishad's work.

The composition of the working committee shows that there was to be a very close liaison between the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad as proposed.

Among the resolutions adopted was one which laid down that (a) the Parishad should not encourage that literature which militated against the high ideals of life, which corrupted public taste and put up obstacles in the way of creating goodwill among all people, and (b) the Parishad would encourage literature which helped the people resolve the obvious and living problems facing the masses.

An unfortunate event of the session, however, was the controversy over the formula of “Hindi-Hindustani” versus “Hindustani.” The Hindi Sahitya Sammelan wanted that the proceedings of the Parishad be carried on in “Hindi-Hindustani.” This, to the proponents of Urdu, appeared to be a move to bring in Hindi through the backdoor. Maulana Abdul Huq stoutly opposed the move. So did the other two representatives of Urdu, one of them being Premchand. But Gandhiji would not accept

the suggestion of "Hindustani" as the *via media*. If he had given up the word Hindi, which was the decision of the Hindi Sahitya Sammelan and which he had persuaded them to define so as to include Urdu, he would have done violence to himself and to the Sammelan. "We must remember that the word Hindi is not of Hindu coinage and that it was coined after the Muslim advent to describe the language which Hindus of the North spoke and studied. Many a Mussalman writer of note had described his language as Hindi. And why this quarrel over words when Hindi is defined to include the variations spoken and written by the Hindus and the Muslims?"

This event started a controversy which gave a grievous blow to the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad and *Hans*. Maulana Abdul Huq bitterly attacked the "Hindiwallahs" in Urdu of Hyderabad, and Dr. Ashraf criticised the Sanskritised language of Premchand in *Suhail* of Aligarh.

Premchand wrote a rejoinder in *Hans* (of June) about the true facts of the controversy. The meeting where this happened, he wrote, did not have more than three representatives of Urdu. Despite this thin representation, actual voting showed that, while there were 25 votes for "Hindi-Hindustani," there were as many as 15 for Hindustani. In the circumstances, this "defeat," he maintained, should be taken as a "victory," because in any session where the advocates of "Hindustani" were properly represented, the strength of the two groups could be in the reverse direction. And keeping in view the fact that the proponents of "Hindustani," including himself, had not yet been able to give a concrete shape to the language to be, or to put it on its feet, what better success could they have achieved?

Some of those who participated in the meeting observed that Premchand felt strongly about the stand over "Hindustani," and held himself back because further insistence on this question might have led to a schism and the formation of an organisation which would have rivalled the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad.\*

\*It is interesting to recall that the Parishad's correspondence was carried on in English. When a member of the Parishad expressed his displeasure to Premchand, the latter wrote back: "The Parishad is a child of the Congress and when Congress carries on its correspondence in English, why do you think that the Parishad should be free from slavery to the English language? The Parishad's secretary is a non-Hindi person but a devotee of Hindi. If you press your point too far, he too will abandon it."

This, according to them, was the last thing that he would have desired. He, therefore, piped down and agreed to work with the Parishad, with the idea of achieving his aims through the working of the Parishad.

Welcoming, in the following month's *Hans*, the realisation of the dream of the Parishad, Premchand wrote<sup>4</sup> that owing to the two postponements of the meeting because of Gandhiji's indifferent health, because of the very short notice and because of the inability to draw up the agenda, the number of representatives from the provincial literary parishads was not large. But it was a happy thing that the inauguration was done by Gandhiji. "While there were separate all-India organisations for every other aspect of national life, there was none in the field of literature, the strongest limb of the national life. It was necessary to have a platform where eminent writers of all the Indian languages could get together to exchange ideas on problems confronting society and literature, to strengthen and bring about unity of ideas among them, to widen their horizon, and to check the growth of the tendency of provincialism in literature and thinking which has been growing steadily and now represents a danger to national unity. . . . True literature can flourish only in an atmosphere wherein there is mutual exchange of ideas. Within the boundaries of a province, literature will be pale, emaciated and half-alive. It was this object that aroused us to set up the Parishad. And even though we have not yet achieved what we set out to do, we hope sincerely that one day this Parishad would really become India's principal literary body."

The Parishad, Premchand hoped, would be a purely literary organisation which, in due course, would take the place of India's Academy of Letters. To allow any one language to dominate others, he said, would be fatal. Completely independent of all provincial literatures, it should represent all. The provincial parishads should have the right to elect delegates to the all-India parishad and it was but natural to expect that they would elect only those who had earned this right through service to literature. "Groupism among writers in the provincial fields," he wrote, "would hamper the utility of the Parishad. What is required is not the conferment of honours and positions, but litterateurs who would advance literature, elevate it and give it a unity."

PREMCHAND'S PREOCCUPATION WITH ideas relating to the role of literature in strengthening nationalism, the harassments to which he was put by his Saraswati Press, *Hans* and *Jagaran*, the time he had to devote to translating his own works from Hindi into Urdu and such other works as the history of the world, the time he "wasted" in the filmland of Bombay—these are some of the factors which slowed down the progress of his last completed novel, *Godan*. This 600-page novel, which seems to have been begun in 1932—in August 1933, he wrote of his intention of "resuming" it—was not completed till the end of November 1934 when the "last pages" had yet to be written. In fact, the novel seems to have been finalised only about the time of the author's return from Bombay to Banaras, i.e. in March 1935. The time taken in writing *Godan*, thus, seems to have been much more than the time taken for the writing of any of his earlier novels which had seldom taken more than twelve to eighteen months. Printing of the novel—by his own press—also seems to have taken an inordinately long time; it came out in June 1936!

This classic on the life of a north Indian peasant, considered by some to be his best novel, is certainly the most important and is different from his earlier novels which ended generally on a note of Gandhian compromise, or idealism. Some critics have, in fact, drawn symbolic parallelisms between the vicissitudes of life that Premchand had to go through and the hard and cruel realities of the life of peasant Hori, the hero of this epic of rural India.

Hori, the hero of *Godan*, cultivates less than an acre of land to feed himself, his wife Dhaniya, his son Gobar, aged six, and his two daughters Sona and Rupa, aged twelve and eight. Three of his children died in infancy because he could not afford medical treatment for them. Howsoever hard he might work, he is un-

able to pay the land revenue. At thirty-six he is an old man, his body emaciated, his hair all grey, his eyesight weakened. He is shrewd and goes to salaam the *zamindar*, Rai Saheb Amarpal Singh, not because he can get some advantage out of him, but because such visits raise him in the estimation of other villagers. The policeman's sight freezes Hori's blood. When, however, he sees that his landlord's life is in danger and is sure of the latter's implicit approval, he simply jumps at the pathan, jeopardising his own life.

Hori's supreme ambition is to have a cow at his doorstep. "It brightens up a house; and if one could have the *darshan* of a cow in the morning, it would indeed be wonderful." Once, while on his way to Rai Saheb's, he meets Bhola, a cowherd, who is a widower and cannot get married again. He sympathises with Bhola and promises to arrange a match. Not that he really hopes to help Bhola marry, but this is merely social talk. This is one of the small "lies" he is accustomed to tell; for, in his own way, he can be crafty enough to wet the jute, to put cotton seeds in cotton, to increase the weight. All this, according to him, is fair. While he is prepared to cheat his two brothers in regard to the value he realises for the bamboos from the family grove being sold to a merchant, he helps Bhola with fodder on credit. His sympathy is meant to help him get a loan from Bhola, or, perhaps, a cow.

Rai Saheb puts on *khadi* and is a follower of the Congress. He had resigned his seat in the Council and courted arrest in the satyagraha movement. At heart, he says, he is a socialist. His exactions from the tenants are in no way less than those of other zamindars, but his association with the Congress has made him popular, and his misdeeds are thought to be those of his agents. He befriends the officials and exchanges presents with them. He gives alms only to impress others of his class. Basically, he agrees, it is all a fraud. When the labourers refuse "forced labour," he is wild with rage. When the mercenary editor of the *Bijli* voices the grievances of the peasants, he shuts the editor's mouth with subscription for a hundred copies. He raises five hundred rupees from the poor peasants to be spent on drinks, though the party is in connection with *Dhanush Yagya*. When Hori is fined by the *panchayat*, he feels that injustice has been done to Hori and he asks it to disgorge the money. The money,

however, goes not to Hori but to the coffers of the Rai Saheb. He also knows all the bad points of the zamindars and how they cater to the requirements of the officials on tour. He is a realist and knows that the zamindari system does not have a bright future and must disappear.

Hori's son, Gobar, represents the younger generation. He does not like his father, who pays all the taxes due from him, kowtowing to the Rai Saheb. God, he says, has made all of us equal. Hori, however, differs. He believes that all those who are born poor could not have earned good by their actions in their previous life, while those born rich must have.

The past is Hori's only argument. He is a slave to custom, he is superstitious, he acts and behaves exactly in the same way as did his forefathers. And he does so because they did so. He is unable to offer a coin at the altar of the idol at the annual *katha* and, therefore, feels remorseful—not because he is poor but because he cannot offer anything to the idol whom he fears. He does not believe in Gobar's reasoning which may all be very sound; but cannot be put into practice. Says Hori: "I also thought likewise when I was young. When you have to bear all the burdens, as I do, you will understand that our necks are under the heels of these people, and that standing erect before them will not enable us to live." And again: "We have been born to shed our blood, to enrich others, to pay the principal twice over as interest, knowing fully well that the principal is still there to be paid. . . . In other words, there is no deliverance for us."

"Police and the law courts," says his son-in-law, "are there ostensibly to protect us. But they don't afford us any protection from the loot taking place all around us. All are ready to cut the throats of the poor and the helpless. . . . The peasant is like green fodder. If he doesn't give presents and the customary bribes, he cannot continue to live in the village. If he doesn't feed the agents of the zamindar, he cannot exist. The police sub-inspector and the constable are like the peasant's sons-in-law. When they are in the village on official tours, it is incumbent on the peasant to honour them suitably; one adverse report by them would mean the ruination of the entire village. The *kanungo*, *tehsildar*, deputy, agent, collector, commissioner—they all come some time or the other. The peasant has to stand before them



with folded hands, and supply provisions, eggs, chicken, milk, and ghee. Much worse than all this is the village moneylender of whom there are three for every single peasant."

There is the *patwari*, Pateshwari Shah; there is Jhinguri Shah; there is Nokhe Ram; there is Mangru Shah; there is Dulari Sahuyayin with her mask of feminine kindness; and there is Data Din, with the sanction of religion behind him—all leaches who suck the blood of the peasant. There are so many of them because moneylending is by far the easiest and the most profitable business. Also, by implication, capitalism and zamindari system are going to end and their place is being taken by the class of moneylenders in the villages allied to those in the cities.

Mangru Shah had lent fifty rupees to Sobha, Hori's brother, and had realised three hundred—the principal was still there to be paid. Hira had borrowed twenty rupees and paid one hundred and sixty, and thanked God that he had paid off the loan.

Hori ultimately gets a cow, Sundariya, from Bhola and is happy. He thanks the Almighty for this great boon. The news that Hori has got a cow spreads in the village, and the neighbours come to see it, all very jealous of him. But not Sobha and Hira, his brothers, who have separated from him. Hori asks his daughter to go and ask the brothers to come and see the cow. But Dhaniya persuades him. Hori himself goes there and eaves-drops on their talk, that the cow must have been bought out of the money that Hori must have hidden from them. Says one of them: "Money saved through evil ways goes the evil way; God willing, the cow shall die." Hori retraces his steps without meeting the brothers. He thinks of returning the cow to Bhola, but Dhaniya wouldn't agree and is prepared to go and fight it out with his brothers.

One sultry evening, the cow is tethered outside the house. Hori goes to see Sobha who is ill. When he returns late, he sees someone standing close to the cow. "Who's there?" asks Hori. "It's I, dada," says Hira. "I came to get some fire from your oven." Hori feels happy that the brother is now visiting him again. They smoke the *chilam* together. Hori goes inside the house to have his food and, while he is having his food, Gobar shouts that the cow is dying. Data Din is called to treat it. But the cow dies. Obviously, it has been poisoned. Hori is certain Hira has poisoned the cow, but he does not wish to give

public expression to it. After she promises not to mention it to anyone, he confides in Dhaniya. But Dhaniya cannot keep a secret, and it is soon out. Hira decamps. Sobha tells Hori that Hira had borrowed a spade to get some herb. Word reaches the police who arrives to investigate. Hori says the cow has died a natural death. But Dhaniya says that Hira has poisoned it. Hori swears by his son(!) that he has not seen Hira near the cow. The police inspector wishes to search Hira's house. Hori protests because, he says, Hira's *izzat* is his own. He, therefore, negotiates with the police, borrows thirty rupees to bribe the police inspector and the village patwari (twenty and ten rupees respectively). Dhaniya protests and creates a scene. Hori is prepared to beat her up. Matters are stretched. Ultimately the village elders are called upon to pay the bribe to the police inspector. While Hira, who has poisoned the cow, has run away, Hori tills and cultivates his fields in preference to his own. Who else will help Hira's wife, Paniya, if he does not? While Paniya has plenty, Hori's children starve. His wife and his son nearly boycott him. And it is only when Hori falls ill that Dhaniya starts talking to him again. The price of cow has not been paid and Bhola takes away Hori's bullock.

Meanwhile, Gobar who has been visiting Bhola in connection with the deal for the cow, meets Bhola's widowed daughter, Jhuniya, and falls in love with her. The romance advances and Jhuniya is pregnant. Hori's wife informs him of this happening, and Hori is furious. In fact, Gobar himself promises to fetch Jhuniya but, half-way between Bhola's village and Hori's, Gobar disappears—and goes away to Lucknow. Hori does not welcome Jhuniya's visit to the house and wants to drive her out. When, however, she tells him there is no other place for her to go, Hori softens. He agrees to give her shelter in the house. "I cannot commit a murder just because I fear society."

Jhuniya's presence is not welcomed in the village, and the panchayat fines Hori a hundred rupees (of which eighty is to go to the Rai Saheb). Dhaniya argues with Hori against the panchayat decision. Hori knows that many of those who imposed the fine are fornicators themselves, but he respects the decision of the "panchayat wherein resides God." If he disobeyed the panchayat, he feels, his family's *izzat* would be ruined. He, therefore, borrows money to pay off the fine. To repay the

loan he sells his entire produce of the season and mortgages his house. He takes seeds on loan from Data Din who now considers him to be his employee. Creditors want their money back. Hori's inability to pay makes his condition pitiable. While he has to find money for his daughter Sona's marriage, his crop is taken away under a decree against him. He flatters Bhola's second wife who lends him Rs. 200 for the marriage.

While Hori's condition is deteriorating and he has to feed his wife, his daughter, his "unlawful" daughter-in-law and her little son, Gobar earns a little money in the town and starts his own business as a vendor selling eats. He takes to the ways of the town life—a Western style hair-cut, smoking of cigarettes and chewing of *pan*, putting on a thin dhoti and using pump shoes. He now wishes to fetch his wife and his child to the town. With this object, he returns to the village.

Gobar's return to the village brings to Hori's house all his creditors who suspect that Gobar has brought good money to his father. Among the creditors is Data Din who had loaned thirty rupees to Hori some eight years earlier, and now wants two hundred in full and final payment. Gobar, who has himself been doing moneylending in the town, calculates and says that the interest totals up to thirty-six only, and that, along with the principal, Data Din could claim only sixty-six, and that he is prepared to settle it at seventy. But Data Din is firm; he must have two hundred. Hori is distressed. "Had it been the *bania*'s money, he might have taken it easy; but here it was a Brahmin's money, and if he kept a pie, it would break through his very bones." Gobar feels sorry that he had intervened at all. "Why should I suffer for the misdeeds of my father?" he tells his wife. "He did not consult me before taking the loan, nor did he take it for my sake. Why should I pay it?" Zamindar Rai Saheb's men tell Hori that he has to pay arrears of revenue for two years. Hori says he has paid it. They do not agree. Then Gobar argues with the zamindar's agent and his cronies and they admit that Hori has paid all the dues.

"Justice and law are on the side of those who have money. Although it is true that the moneylenders should not be hard on the debtor and the zamindar on the tenant, what do we see every day? The zamindar gets his tenant bound down and the money-lender kicks him. And it will continue to be what it is."

All these events make Gobar unhappy; he wishes to return to the city and leave his parents to stew in their own juice. "You fed me so long as I was a child," he tells his mother. "Then you threw me into the world like an orphan. I ate as much as others did. I haven't been born to pay off the debts incurred by others. After all I too have a wife and a child."

Hori is pained to see the rudeness of his son towards himself and his wife and his preparation to leave without wishing goodbye. He asks the son to touch the feet of one who has given him birth and has fed him. But Gobar retorts that he does not consider Dhaniya to be his mother! Hori sheds a tear. "As you wish, son," he says. "All that I wish is that you should be happy wherever you are." And Gobar leaves for the town.

Back in the town, Gobar finds that others have taken over his "beat." He is now forced to take up the job of a labourer in a sugar mill. His son dies. His life in the city is miserable. He gets up early, reaches the mill before dawn and returns late in the evening. He gets tired and loses his temper. Like others of his class, he takes to drinking. And, under the influence of liquor, he calls Jhuniya names, beats her and attempts to throw her out of the house! In the meantime, the factory owners precipitate a strike in the mill because, first, their godowns are full and can last six months or so and, secondly, because, on this pretext, they can recruit cheap labour. The factory owners are in league with the police. The strike precipitated by the proposed cut in wages, leads to a scuffle between the old and the new labourers. Gobar gets injured and it is after a long time that he recovers. He understands Jhuniya better. Life around the sugar mill is vicious. Its owner Khanna, like the Rai Saheb, is also a "nationalist" and has courted imprisonment during the *satyagraha* movement. When his mill catches fire and is burnt down, reducing him from a millionaire to the state of bankruptcy, he admits the malpractices that he has been carrying on—underweighing, bribery and corruption. Associated with him are a social butterfly Miss Malati, a typical urbanite, and also Professor Mehta, an idealist philosopher, who is responsible for a transformation of Malati's character into that of a social worker. The two have Platonic attachment to each other and visit the villages, studying the life there and giving advice. In the meantime, Hori continues to put up with hardships. When

the village *chamars* beat up Brahmin Mata Din, Data Din's son who is a moneylender, for carrying on an affair with Siliya, a *chamarin*, Mata Din disowns her. Siliya finds shelter in the only house that would take her—that of Hori's.

Mata Din, however, is "purified" in a protracted ceremony by the Brahmins from Banaras. Subsequently, when he is told that Siliya has given birth to a son, he is happy and, when the son dies, he himself consecrates him to the Ganga waters. This incident brings about a transformation in his character and he starts living with Siliya openly. "I wish to remain a *chamar* now. He who does his duty is a true Brahmin and he who does not is a *chamar*."

Hori's condition, meanwhile, grows worse every day. His land is taken away. He is forced to give away his daughter, Rupa, to an old man who is only four years younger than he. Gobar is invited to the marriage. And when Gobar arrives from the city to the village, he finds that "one portion of the house is about to collapse. There is little hope. On Hori's doorstep there is only one bullock and this too is half dead. Hori's isn't an individual case. The entire village has the same sorry tale to tell. . . . There is not one man whose condition is above pity. It looks as if there is no life in their bodies but only grief, making them dance like puppets. They go about, work, are ground down, only because they are fated to be so. There is no hope for them in this life—and they have no ambition. It looks as if the very source of their life has dried up; all its verdure gone. It is the harvesting season, but there is no corn. Unhappiness is writ large upon every face. ▲ major portion of the produce has been sold away in advance, i.e. before it has gone beyond the winnowing place, to the moneylenders and the petty officials. What is left belongs to others. . . . The future of the peasant is dark; he sees no way out; all his senses are dead and dulled; before his house, there are heaps of refuse and waste which stink, but his sense of smell is gone. His eyes are without a beam. At dusk, jackals roam about his house. None, however, takes notice of all this, or feels sorry about it. . . . Whatsoever is placed before them, they eat—just as the engine eats coal. Isn't it a shame that while their oxen do not put their mouth into the manger unless there is gram flour, the peasants just fill their stomach? Taste is immaterial. Indeed, their palates do not know what

taste is. Peasants may be dishonest for half a paisa, strike anybody for a handful of grain. But so deep is their degeneration, that they cannot differentiate between self-respect and shame."

Gobar compares the life of a labourer with the farmer's. "He works in the mill, gets two meals a day and has only one master. Here in the village, one has to listen to rebukes from so many people and to work hard and produce for others, himself only to starve. Only father can do this. I could not bear it for a day."

And such was the condition not only of Hori but of all others in the village. There was none in the village whose face did not present the picture of gloom.

Mr. Khanna, incidentally, has established a sugar mill near Hori's village. The entire produce of the village, therefore, is sent to it. There is a sort of fraternity between the moneylenders and Mr. Khanna's agents. Moneylender Jhinguri Shah looks after the transactions, "so that his clients may not be cheated." When Hori's turn for receiving the money comes, it is Jhinguri Shah who receives the money and, out of Rs. 120 that he receives, he deducts 95 and pays him 25, which also is snatched away by Nokhe Ram, who accosts Hori as soon as he goes out of the premises. As a result, Hori comes home empty-handed. On the way home, Hori meets Giridhar who is tipsy with toddy. He says to Hori: "Jhinguria has taken all, Hori Kaka. He hasn't left a pice with me—the brute. I wept, I entreated, but that tyrant would have no pity." Sobha tells him: "But you are drunk with toddy and still you say that he has not left you anything." Giridhar points to his stomach: "Evening is on. Not a drop of water has gone down my throat. I hid a one-anna piece in my mouth, which I spent on toddy. I said to myself: 'Man, you have sweated the whole year through. Have the fun of toddy one day. But, to tell you the truth, I am not drunk. How could one be drunk with stuff worth one anna. . . . It is so very good, Kaka, the account is cleared. I borrowed 20 and have paid 160. Is there a limit?'"

When Sobha asks Hori if they will ever be free from the moneylenders' clutches, Hori says: "There is no hope in this life. We ask neither for a kingdom, nor for a throne, not even for comforts. We want to have coarse meals and coarse clothes—and to live with our honour intact. But even that is denied to us."

The cruelty of the system is shown vividly in a farcical drama staged by the villagers. The peasant comes, falls at the feet of the *thakur* and weeps. The *thakur*, after much hesitation, consents to lend him ten rupees. The promissory note is written and it is signed by the peasant. The *thakur* then gives him five rupees. The peasant is taken aback.

"But they are only five, master," he says.

"They are not five; they are ten. Go home and count them again."

"No master, they are really five."

"One rupee as your *nazrana*," says the moneylender.

"Yes, master."

"One rupee for writing the note."

"Yes, master."

"One rupee for the government paper."

"Yes, master."

"One rupee as the *dasturi*?"

"Yes, master."

"One rupee as interest."

"Yes, master."

"And five rupees in cash. All these do add up to ten or not?"

"Then, master," says the peasant, "please keep these five, too, with you for me."

"What a fool you are!"

"No, master. One rupee as *nazar* to the senior *thakurani*; one rupee for her *pan-beeda*. One rupee as *nazar* to the junior *thakurani* and another for her *pan-beeda*. The balance, one rupee, for your last rites."

The fun made of the moneylender creates further problems for Hori.

Rupa's husband is aged. Having lived in poverty all her life she is at last rolling in wealth. She behaves like a traditional wife, resigned to her fate. But Hori feels guilty for having arranged this uneven match.

Meanwhile, Hira, having poisoned the cow, becomes obsessed with the guilt of his crime; he runs mad, stays in mental hospital, begs, but ultimately musters courage to return to the village. When Hori, now sick, sees him, he is happy at the reunion and forgives his brother's "crime."

Hori is still under debt. After a struggle lasting thirty years, he has lost the battle of life. "He has been, as it were, made to stand at the city gates. Whosoever enters it, spits at his face and he cries out to them: 'Brethren, I deserve your pity. I never knew what the June heat or what the January chill or July rain was. Dissect this body and see if there is life in it. See how hard it has been kicked and trampled under foot. Ask it: Have you ever known what comfort is? Have you ever enjoyed shade?' " .

To earn his bread, and to pay the interest on the loans, he is forced by circumstances to take further loans. Loans keep on piling up. He makes ropes by night and works on double shift as a labourer on the road.

After days of semi-starvation, his inside is "eaten up." One day he has a heat stroke, collapses on the roadside and vomits. His pulse beat grows faint. He is brought home. There is no money in the house to send for the doctor.

"Please forgive me for my acts of omission and commission, Dhaniya," he tells his wife. "I am going now. My ambition for a cow has remained unfulfilled. All that is left will be spent on the last rites. Don't weep. How long can you keep me alive! We have been ruined. Let me go now."

The moneylender comes again in the shape of the heartless Brahmin, with all the sanction and authority of religion and custom behind him. Says Pandit Data Din: "The end is come, Dhaniya. Let Hori give away a cow with his dying hand to seek his salvation."

But there is no cow in the house; nor is there money for it. There are only twenty annas in the house—the previous night's earnings from ropes. Dhaniya brings it, puts it into the hand of the Brahmin and says: "Maharaj, there is no cow in the house, not even a she-calf. Except these twenty annas, there is nothing left in the house. This then is his godan." She faints. Hori dies.

It is at this point that the life story of Hori, the Indian peasant, ends. The novel proved to be Premchand's godan to Hindi and Urdu literature. It was hailed by most critics as the unsurpassed classic of rural India. The real fame that this piece of fiction attained, however, came after the author's death.

Such was the stage of Hindi journalism and literature that Premchand himself had to ask his friends to arrange for the review of the book.



When the editor of *Madhuri* asked for another copy of *Godan* for review, as was the convention, Premchand wrote back: "I am glad to hear that you are reviewing *Godan*. Literature is in a bad way. There are few good publishers today. If you write a book and go in search of a publisher who could pay you reasonably well for your labour, or publish it on royalty basis, you won't find one anywhere in the country. When you ask for payment, you would be told that the book has not sold. That's why myself and a few other writers for whom writing is a means of livelihood started publishing their books on their own. Had there been some good publishers, why should we have undertaken the work of publication? . . .

"Responsibility for this state of affairs is partly that of the journalists, of whom I am one. What is necessary is that when something good comes out, it should be welcomed, the writer should be encouraged, and an attempt made so that the book may be sold, and the writers and publishers feel encouraged. If all the editors and managers ask for two copies each of a book for review, the author would go bankrupt. Postage alone on one copy of *Godan*, as you know, comes to twelve annas. On two copies it would be one and a half rupees. Fifty copies sent out for review would thus mean forty rupees as postage. Many of the people do not review the book at all. That's why some publishers do not send books for review to newspapers and journals."

## Illness and Worries

THE BOOK MARKET was slack. *Hans* still suffered losses. So did the Saraswati Press. On June 15, 1936, there was no printing paper in the press. In the hot sun and the scorching wind, therefore, Premchand went round the town to arrange for the supply of paper—on credit. When he returned home four hours later, about 6 P.M., he felt exhausted and complained of stomach-ache. The pain did not subside. It aggravated. He felt uncomfortable and took no food. That night he vomited three times and was bedridden.

Homoeopathic and allopathic medicines were tried, but his condition continued to deteriorate. Within a few days, he became so weak that it was difficult for him to stand on his legs. And it was in this condition that he heard the news of Maxim Gorky's death. Such was the admiration in which he held the Russian writer, that, according to Mrs. Premchand, he could not sleep. At two o'clock in the morning she saw him scribbling with tears in his eyes.

"What are you writing at this hour?" she asked.

"Nothing in particular," he said.

"But you are writing something."

"Yes, there is to be a meeting in the office of *Aaj* day after tomorrow to condole Gorky's death and I must pay my tribute."

"You are not well. And yet you are busy writing."

"But I cannot sleep. This tribute has to be written."

"How can you write it when you are not well?"

"But this is very important. It has to be done. When one is working at one's own will, one is oblivious of discomforts. When you consider yourself duty bound to do a thing, there are no obstacles." He continued to write.

"Gorky was such a great writer that the question about his nationality does not arise," said Premchand when asked whether Gorky had anything to do with India. "In the case of a writer

you do not ask whether he is a European or an Indian. What the writer writes is for everybody."

"But did he write anything for India?"

"What does a writer possess to distribute in bits? He has only the sweat of his labour. And he distributes to all and sundry all that he has. He does not keep anything for himself. While others sweat for their own good, the writer sweats for the good of all. When literacy spreads in India, Gorky's name will become a household word in every Indian home, and he will be worshipped like Surdas and Kabir."

The conversation continued till four in the morning and only then was he persuaded to sleep. He completed the address on the following day. On the day of the meeting, he insisted that he be taken to *Aaj* office. Even though he was too weak to climb the stairs, he was adamant to climb. When he reached the place, he could not stand on his feet. He could not even read out his own address—someone else had to read it on his behalf. (This was the last address he ever delivered.)

Soon after, Premchand's two sons came from Allahabad to Banaras on their summer vacation. Premchand's condition was worsening. On June 25, he felt uncomfortable. At 2-30 A.M. next morning he felt very bad.

"It's warm in here, Dhunnu," he said, "please fan me."

A little later he vomited blood. His wife rushed to him.

"I am going to die," he told her.

"It's no use getting agitated. You can't go leaving me behind. Let's face it calmly."

"Do you really expect me to live? See that pool of blood. How can anyone who passes blood like that ever hope to live?"

He turned his eyes away. A doctor was sent for. He held out hopes. "This is only phlegm," he said. "I have cured several patients afflicted with this malady."

The doctor's words were reassuring. But that was the last day that Premchand had some sleep. From then on the nights were sleepless—devoted to writing some pages of an incomplete novel and material for *Hans*.

Losses continued to pile up. "I can swear that I have not earned even 20 paises from my books during the last ten years. I have subsisted on what I earned from different jobs. . . . If books don't sell, why should publishers undertake their publi-

cation? I have published two of my books and have yet to pay Rs. 2,000 for the paper used. If one brings out periodicals, one is ruined."

*Hans* brought in Rs. 150 a month and the expenditure on it was Rs. 600. The *Hans* Limited, which had taken over *Hans*, paid only Rs. 1,400 towards the losses of the journal as against some Rs. 4,000 incurred. Premchand maintained that the financial responsibility for profit and loss was that of the *Hans* Limited. Some of the proprietors of the *Hans* Limited, however, thought that the Saraswati Press's printing bill of *Hans* was on the high side and that it could be done cheaply elsewhere.

K. M. Munshi and Kaka Saheb Kalelkar discussed the future of *Hans* on June 22, 1936, in Bombay. They invited Premchand telegraphically to join them in their discussions. But Premchand was sick and could not undertake a journey to Bombay.

The Munshi-Kaka discussions were a prelude to the meeting of the working committee of the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad scheduled for July 4, 1936, at Wardha, when it was to take a final decision about taking over *Hans* from the *Hans* Limited.

Premchand's health did not permit him to go even to Wardha. He wasn't, therefore, present at the first formal meeting of the working committee of the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad that assembled as scheduled at Maganwadi in Wardha under the chairmanship of Mahatma Gandhi.

The working committee's meeting which was attended, besides Gandhiji, by Rajendra Prasad (Vice-chairman), Purushottam Das Tandon, Kaleshwar Rao, Brijlal Biyani, Jamnalal Bajaj (Treasurer), and K. M. Munshi and Kaka Kalelkar (Secretaries), considered the proposal of the *Hans* Limited to transfer *Hans* to the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad and the correspondence thereon between Premchand and K. M. Munshi. The Parishad felt that if Premchand fully agreed to transfer the journal *without its liabilities till date*, the Parishad should take it over and arrange independently for its publication, the printing and publication of *Hans* being entrusted to the Sasta Sahitya Mandal. If, however, Premchand didn't wish to transfer *Hans* to the Parishad, the committee felt, it should endeavour to bring out an independent monthly journal.

The editing of *Hans*, it was also decided, should be done from the head office of the Parishad, i.e. in Wardha, and Kalelkar

was to undertake the principal responsibility of the editorial work of the journal. These decisions were taken in the absence of Premchand whose health was deteriorating.

"For the last fortnight I have been confined to bed," he wrote to Ashk on July 9. "My stomach is not functioning properly. Nor is my liver. . . . I have been deeply pained to read of your difficulties. To be without money in this *mahajani* epoch is a curse and makes life miserable. But, don't forget, poverty and adversity have another aspect too. It is these tribulations that make a man manly and give him self-confidence. The position of Hindi is no better than that of Urdu. Books just don't sell. Publishers are not enthused over new works. It is indeed difficult to make a living out of one's writings alone. The only way out seems to be to devote one's life to a newspaper. If one could, one should go and settle down in a village, rear a cow or two, cultivate a little and spend one's life in serving the people of the village. By living in cities, particularly big cities, one only wastes one's health and life and everything else."

The ending is poignant. "That's enough for the time being. I am tired and shall now lie down."

A fortnight later he wrote to Akhtar Hussain Raipuri: "I have been sick for about a month. I suffer from gastric ulcer and vomit blood. I am, therefore, unable to do any work. I am under treatment, but there is no appreciable improvement yet.

"If I survive, I shall certainly bring out the *Bisvin Sadi* for the propagation of your ideas. My connection with *Hans* is now severed. It was an unnecessary headache. By working with people who are commercially minded, all that I have earned is the blame that I have spent more money on the journal than I should have. None has thought of how hard I worked, absolutely single-handed, at the cost of my own time and health. I had given away *Hans* only with the hope that it would continue to be printed at my press and that, therefore, I would not have to worry about the press. As things stand at present it would be published by the Sasta Sahitya Mandal of Delhi, resulting in a saving of some fifty rupees per month! I am happy over this development. The books that I was publishing do not correctly reflect our literature. It is only the idolatrous literature reflecting the mahajani civilisation, of which there is plenty in Hindi."

At 2 A.M. on July 25, Premchand again vomited blood. Mrs. Premchand wanted to send for the doctor.

"Please don't bother anyone at this time of the night. The doctor is no God. We'll call him tomorrow. Get me now a piece of paper and a pen (for the will) . . . so that I make some provision for you. I don't have much time to live now."

He was soon in delirium. Even though he regained consciousness for a little while on the following morning, the delirium continued the whole day. Every night at about 2-30 A.M. he would feel terrible.

It was thought advisable that an X-ray examination be carried out. But the equipment available at Banaras was out of order. Premchand, therefore, went to Lucknow along with Dhunnu.

"You'll be surprised to get this letter of mine from Lucknow," he wrote to his old friend Nigam on August 5, 1936. "For the last one and a half or two months I have had an inflamed liver. Twice during this period, I have vomited several seers of blood. The treatment at Banaras did me little good. On August 2, therefore, I came here and am under the treatment of Rai Bahadur Dr. Hargovind Sahai. Examination of my blood, stools and urine is over. A lot, however, still remains to be done. It is after all these preliminaries that he'd be able to diagnose the malady and begin the treatment. I may have to stay here for about a fortnight. I have been reduced to half. I can eat nothing. Nor can I digest anything. In fact, it is with great effort that I take some Horlicks and that too once a day. Here in Lucknow I am staying as the guest of Master Kripa Shankar. But his house is too small. In a few days, I hope to get another place and shift there. Now, whatever money I had brought has been spent. I had come here originally for X-ray. But you know the number of examinations that are necessary and also how expensive medical treatment is. One has to pay fees at every step. I have written home for some money, but it may take time before I get it; this is because the bank account is in my name. In the meantime, if you could send me a hundred rupees telegraphically, I shall be very grateful. It is, of course, just likely that I'll get the money from Banaras too, and will not need yours. But I do wish to have a little extra money with me as a precaution. If, however, the telegraphic money order charges appear excessive, please send it in the

ordinary way. . . . Let us see whether I get cured, or it becomes the Last Message."

Nigam, who visited Premchand at Lucknow thrice, saw that he had greatly emaciated. When the physician diagnosed the malady and explained it to Premchand in the presence of Nigam, the latter's "heart 'sank." Premchand understood, "but did not give expression to a feeling of helplessness because his son was also there." He called his wife to Lucknow. And while she planned to meet him there, Premchand himself returned to Banaras. In about a week of absence from Banaras, he had become considerably weak.

"I won't live now," he said to his wife. "It is dropsy. I have eaten nothing for the last three days."

"What has the doctor advised you to eat?"

"Barley water and milk," he said, adding, "I have been passing loose motions for the last several days. Maybe the doctor gave me a strong purgative. I felt sorry that poor *Hakimji* had to handle the commode. He, I tell you, is an angel; he attended on me all the time, asked Dhunnu to go to sleep, and sat by my side every night. I would barter several thousand Hindus for this Muslim hakim. Frankly, I cannot lavish adequate praise on how he attended on me and what he did for me. If at all I recover, there is nothing that I won't do for him."

"You ought to have stayed on at Lucknow," Mrs. Premchand said. "I would have come."

"I was afraid lest I should die there—without seeing you in my last moments."

Anyway, he was back in Banaras. He now wanted to be taken to his village. "When I went there the last time," he said, "I improved. That's why I have been requesting you, time and again, to take me to the village. It would do me good. I tell you."

Mrs. Premchand was thinking over his wishes. "But it is so far from the town," said Dhunnu. "You can never be sure how he would feel there. And there is no medical assistance in the village. Here at least doctors are available."

"You are right, Rani," said Premchand, "we cannot really go to the village immediately."

"I don't have the heart to take you to the village now. When you improve a little, I'll feel emboldened to shift you there."

The family, however, shifted from Nati Imli area to a house in mohalla Ramkatora, which Premchand had himself seen earlier. Once it was the summer house of Bharatendu Harishchandra. The month of August, when the family shifted, marked the peak of the monsoon. It was raining heavily. "Have the books and manuscripts been packed properly?" Premchand asked, himself unable to move. And he added: "But does it matter now?"

The cart carrying the household effects trampled on the foot of the younger son. Told of this, the father cried: "It seems that all the troubles come together."

Premchand was transported in a tonga, Mrs. Premchand holding him with one hand and the daughter's child with the other.

The bedstead in the new house lay in the direction of north to south.\* "Let us put it in the east-west direction," Mrs. Premchand said.

"How will that change the course of events? It happens as it is fated to happen."

\*Considered a bad omen, for it is so placed only during the last few moments of one's life.



## Last Testament

MEANWHILE, THE U.P. Government had demanded a security of Rs. 1,000 from *Hans* for the publication of a "seditious" drama entitled *Siddhanta Swatantriya* by Seth Govind Das, in the June and July 1936 issues. The Congress and the Parishad policy was not to deposit any security.

Three days before the expiry of the last date for the deposit of the security, an announcement, dated August 12, 1936, and signed by Premchand, said: "Looking to the financial state of *Hans*, it was impossible for us to deposit the security. It appeared advisable, therefore, to close down the publication of *Hans*. We had to decide that no more than the formes already printed need be printed, and that whatever had been printed for the August issue should be despatched. We hope our kind subscribers, contributors and friends appreciating the difficulties of *Hans* would bear with us courageously the departure *sine die* of the journal and forgive us for all the faults. We also request that since the publication work of the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad would now be from Delhi, those wishing to correspond with it would kindly write care of the Sasta Sahitya Mandal, Delhi."

Premchand, now on death-bed, was infuriated over the decision of the Parishad to close down *Hans*. He maintained that *Hans* was still his, and that the Parishad had no right to ask him to close it down. There was an exchange of letters between Premchand and K. M. Munshi and others of the Bharatiya Sahitya Parishad. Even Gandhiji was approached to intervene. And it seems that it was at the latter's intervention that the Parishad agreed that it be left open to Premchand to deposit the security and bring out *Hans*.

The crisis of *Hans* made him decide to give up the idea of starting another journal from January 1937 to propagate the ideology of the Progressive Writers Association, and to restart *Hans* after depositing the security.

"You deposit the security, Rani," said Premchand to his wife. "I will straighten it out when I get well."

She hesitated.

"No, you must deposit it," said Premchand. "Whether I am alive or not, *Hans* must continue. This will be a memorial to me."

Dhunnu was asked to deposit the security. Premchand, however, thought his son may not be able to comply with the formalities, and summoned Nigam from Kanpur telegraphically.

When Nigam reached Banaras in the morning, he found Premchand, who would have "stood out in a thousand people," reduced so much that it was difficult to recognise him. "Sunken eyes, shrunk cheeks," and a "bulging tummy," were all that was left of him. Tears flowed down the cheeks of the ever-laughing "Bambook." He had neither the strength to get up nor even the strength to turn on his side. He clasped Nigam's hand and put it on his chest, more like a frightened child holding on to the mother's lap. He was so weak, Nigam tells us, that he had to make a great effort even to speak. He talked feebly. And when he was advised not to exert himself, he said: "There is little hope of another meeting with you. I wish to tell you everything. Others who come here talk in a provocative vein. I called you to deposit the security for *Hans*."

The security had, in fact, been deposited. The September issue was sent to the press. As he was sick, he had called Jainendra Kumar to assist him. And Jainendra was to be all in all.

In September 1936, we find Premchand writing: "I am extremely weak, and cannot move about." And again: "My health is very weak these days and I have given up reading and writing." In fact, however, *Hans* continued to receive his attention.

Though somewhat delayed, the September issue did come out. In an editorial, Premchand wrote that "our friends must have heard of the demand for security from the brave *Hans* which established unity among progressive litterateurs, and of the subsequent decision of the proprietors of *Hans* Limited to close it down. I have deposited the security, and *Hans* will be out under my editorship, assisted by Jainendra Kumar and Shri Bharatiya. It would promote the writing of healthy and progressive literature, and its advancement and propagation. It would carry articles by eminent and honoured writers of Hindi on world developments in general and Indian events in particular, sketches

of great writers and men of action, short stories, serialised novels, book reviews, etc. It will be our instrument for the moulding of a free India, and it will help in its achievement. It will carry interesting articles on political, social and psycho-analytical subjects. It will also carry humorous articles. It would thus present material both for thought and entertainment.

"This journal, which would also present to the world the works in provincial literatures, would be inter-provincial in character. Keeping in tune with the world-wide progressive thought currents, it would also be international in character. In sum, it would carry the message and support all the forces that are inimical to the unhealthy, bad and lifeless in art and literature, and help whatever is critical and progressive and arouses the consciousness." He appealed to writers and poets to encourage and help by sending their contributions, to the readers for frank suggestions ("which will be heartily received"), and to artists for their work.

The issue, edited by Premchand alone, appears to have been brought out in a hurry. The list of contents is issued as a fly leaf! Gone are the sections devoted to provincial literatures and the superior quality of printing, and also some of the advertisements, including those of Mr. and Mrs. K. M. Munshi's books.

The issue carried Premchand's essay *Mahajani Sabhyata* wherein he propounded the thesis that the old social orders based on feudalism and imperialism, which imposed disadvantages and disabilities on the common people, had a brighter side too. The individual in those orders retained his qualities of head and heart. Even the tyrant king and the extortionate zamindar were capable of showing kindness and mercy. The *mahajani* social order which had replaced the two earlier orders in most parts of the world, however, propagated only evil and had no brighter side whatsoever. Under the new social order, the supreme place had been taken up by Mammon which was being worshipped like a god.

Greed for money had completely enslaved Man. The only test for good upbringing and correct behaviour today was the wealth that one had. However evil a wealthy man might be, he seemed to have all the qualities. His wealth made literature and arts bow before his threshold. And such was the hold of

money that the doctors and *hakims* would attend on patients only if they were paid handsome fees. Lawyers and advocates also weighed their minutes with sovereigns. The *maulvi* and the Brahmin priest were also the slaves of the wealthy. The Press too joined in the chorus of praise. Indeed, wealth had come to dominate human affairs to such a degree that it appeared difficult to assault its hold on man from any direction. And circumstances had so enslaved man that it had forced every one to be caught in its tentacles.

Mahajani civilisation had prescribed a new code of conduct and behaviour under which "time is wealth" and "business is business." The mahajan went about gallivanting, and every one, including the king and the minister, had to pay court to Mammon which held the keys even to war and peace.

Premchand ascribed all the evils of the world to wealth and its code of conduct. Where the inequalities of wealth determined the social status of man, there followed the use of force, fraud, lies, prostitution, licentiousness, and all other evils. Those with privileges would naturally like to safeguard them and, where necessary, use force to keep them. If the exploited showed the least signs of revolt or opposition, there was the police to suppress them, the law courts to punish them and, finally, the recourse to exile.

There was yet another aspect to this question. The mahajani social order had also devised means to mislead the people into believing that poverty, disease and slavery were manifestations of the Heavenly justice, or the result of actions of the previous lives, and had to be put up with.

Premchand welcomed the rise of a new civilisation from the "Far West," coming as the "messianic deliverer" to weaken the hold of Mammon. It had put an end to capitalism and the worship of Mammon. It had broken the claws and blunted the teeth of the so-called individual freedom (to exploit the labour of others). The fundamental tenet of this new civilisation was that every individual who, through manual or mental labour, created wealth, deserved to be an honoured member of society and State. Contrarily, one who lived on the earnings of his forefathers or the labours of others, who raised the prices of articles of everyday consumption in order to profiteer, or created instruments of death to crush the weaker nations, was to be

despised and abhorred like deadly poison. Living in style far above that of others around, should be considered vulgar. And if anyone lived in great comfort while others in squalor, his example was not for emulation, but for condemnation. No individual should fatten himself on the sweat and hard labour of others.

The freedom and independence under the new code that obtained in one particular country was of a type that was not to be seen even in the so-called most civilised of all nations. Capitalism stood poised against the new civilisation which made the moneylender and the businessman nervous and panicky. All these vested interests, controlling the media of propaganda, had combined to raise their voice against the new civilisation which was being criticised as the enemy of individual freedom, of free exercise of religious belief and the prevalent ideas of freedom of the spirit. All sorts of allegations and charges were being cooked up and levied against this new social order and it was being painted in the blackest of hues. But truth must penetrate through the darkness.

The argument that this new social order did not suit the social organisation or religious traditions of such and such a country, or that it was contrary to the social climate of a particular country, was absolutely untenable. Praise, therefore, had to go to that civilisation which was putting an end to capitalism and individual property and wealth. Its success in one country had shown that sooner or later it would be adopted by the entire world.

This then was Premchand's last testament. He wanted the zamindar as well as the moneylender, all who sucked the blood of the poor, to be eliminated.

"Are you not a Gandhian?" he was asked.

"Even though I believe in the Mahatma's philosophy of change of heart, I am not really Gandhian. His philosophy can bring the zamindari system to an end. Anyhow, land shall one day belong to the peasant who tills it."

Closely related to his thesis on mahajani civilisation is his incomplete novel *Mangal Sutra* of which he wrote four chapters (some 70 pages) while in his sick bed. This novel is the story of a writer "Mahatma" Dev Kumar, his wife Shaivya, his elder son Sant Kumar, a lawyer, and his wife Pushpa, his younger son Sadhukumar, and a married daughter Pankaja.

Dev Kumar is a devotee of literature. He has little love for money and his needs are few. His books are best sellers, but all that he has earned as a writer is fame outside his home. In his own home, however, he is not honoured except by the younger son who follows in the footsteps of his father and, like him, places idealism above the acquisition of wealth.

Dev Kumar had not only not earned much from his writings, but he had also disposed of his ancestral property and had become a pauper. Service to literature in India was not the way to earn money. At times, anyway, poverty pinched hard, and he thought that it would perhaps have been better to cut grass or to sell sweets.

The writer's elder son, Sant Kumar, wishes to earn as much as possible—and to live comfortably. He expects his father also to do likewise. But Dev Kumar's awakened consciousness could never bring itself round to worship wealth. Not that he did not know the value of money. He did. But he sincerely believed that in a country where three-fourths of the people starved, none had a moral justification to amass wealth. In a social order based on exploitation, neither literature nor art could flourish. For, if the masses were illiterate, the writer and the artist had necessarily to be poor.

It was impossible to bend Dev Kumar through threats. Before reason, however, he himself bowed his head. These days he pondered over the dilemma: "Why this chaos in the world?" The theory of actions in this life and those in the previous one did not help resolve this question. If the entire universe is one, why should there be these differences? Why should one man who toils the whole life still starve, while another without the least effort lie on a bed of roses? Is it the universal spirit? Or, is it the complete absence of it? Reason says: "All are free here and they are also free to improve their prospects through their own strength and efforts." Doubt says: "Where is the equality of opportunity? There is certainly equality in the market place: anyone can buy what he wishes to. But one needs money to buy. When some don't have money, this talk of equality of opportunity is meaningless!"

This sort of searching of the soul had never taken place in Dev Kumar's life. The litterateur in him could not be satisfied with the existing social order. And there was no way to remove

the imbalance. "Where is Justice?" he contemplated. "If a poor peasant steals a few sheaves of corn, he is arrested and punished. On the other hand, the rich who rob the people in broad daylight are honoured by society and awarded titles. People armed with all sorts of weapons come down upon the workers and peasants, enslave them and rob them in the name of taxes, levies, and so on and so forth. And they all draw huge salaries, have all the comforts and pleasures and indulge in licentiousness. Is this the world created by God? Is this justice?"

And "there always have been, and will always be, pious people who claim that the world is based on religion and moral law. They sacrifice their own lives and quit the world. But why call them pious? They are cowards and greedy self-seekers. The pious is one who defends justice and gives his life for it. If, however, he willingly turns his face away, he is straying from the path of true religion. If the viciousness of the social organisation does not prick him, he is not only blind but is also a fool. He is not really pious. And here it is not necessary to be one. It is these pious men who, by propagating ideas of fate, God, and worship, have immortalised viciousness. Rather than live as we do and succumb to the existing social order, it would have been better if man had ended this. Man will have to become man. Surrounded as he is by beastly creatures, he shall have to arm himself. For, to allow oneself to be made a prey symbolises not piety but stupidity. . . ."

The novel, parts of which were written on his deathbed, remained unfinished. It might have been Premchand's best.

Be that as it may, quite a few people have seen in this novel a veiled autobiography of Premchand. The Gandhi in him, as one would have said, had either gone asleep or the image of the Mahatma had been dislodged from the inner temple of his heart. He now wanted injustice to be fought and put an end to.

PREMCHAND'S LITERARY WORK on his sick-bed and his worries about the future of *Hans* undoubtedly worsened his condition. The doctors had, obviously, given him up. On the morning of October 7, he passed a loose motion. This happened repeatedly during the day. By the time night came, he was already in agony.

"In this condition, Jainendra, people think of God," said Premchand, uttering the words with difficulty. "I also have been advised to do likewise, but I haven't yet been able to persuade myself to bother Him."

He mentioned the burden on his mind—the future of his wife and children, and the future of *Hans*, its hopes and its aspirations to serve Indian literature. More expressive than his words were his gestures and his eyes.

The principal problem worrying him clearly was how to keep *Hans* going and the vacuum to be left behind, should it close down. The thought that the journal might be closed down was unbearable. He was not prepared to bend and compromise. He wanted someone to assure him that *Hans*, his "third son," would live.

But Jainendra Kumar could hold out no such hope. Indeed, over this issue, he entered into an argument with Premchand. The latter watched listlessly.

"Press here," said Premchand, stretching out his arm, at the dead of night, everyone else in the house having gone to sleep.

Jainendra pressed his arm.

"Jainendra . . ." said Premchand. He did not complete the sentence.

A long pause . . . and then: "Ideals won't do."

"But ideals . . ." said Jainendra. The sentence wasn't completed. Jainendra felt remorseful and guilty for entering into an argument with a man about to die.



"Don't argue," said Premchand, turning on his side and closing his eyes once again.

"It's warm," he said a little later, "please fan me."

Premchand was fanned, but he couldn't sleep. He was in great agony. He did not cry; he only lay with his eyes closed.

Three o'clock in the morning of October 8. He told Jainendra to go to sleep. Soon thereafter, he went into a coma.

In a state of half-consciousness later in the morning, he asked for some tooth powder and water to cleanse his mouth. Before these could be brought to him, he could neither move nor speak.

"Won't you cleanse your mouth?" asked Mrs. Premchand. . . . Her brother caught her hand and told her he was no more.

The light that had lit millions of hearts in all parts of India had gone out. The life of the master storyteller who had given joy and happiness to countless people, who had carried on a ceaseless campaign for political freedom and social reform, who had given a voice to the dumb and mute dwellers of rural India, who had elevated human existence, had become a story, and his name a legend.

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